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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

ELDERLY WOMEN'S PATTERNS OF FRIENDSHIP IN A RECREATION ORGANIZATION

BY

VERONICA LOUISE SCOTT

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

IN

RECREATION

DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION AND LEISURE STUDIES

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1990

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DEGREE: MASTER OF ARTS

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Debra Shogan
DEBRA SHOGAN

Sharon McInnis Abu-Laban
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DAVID WHITSON

Date: November 27, 1989

To the memory of my father, Guy N. Scott (1914 - 1988).

ABSTRACT

This study explores friendship and recreation in the lives of a group of women over the age of sixty-five years. Participant observation is the method by which friendship patterns and recreation interests are described. Conversational interviews with twelve members futher defines friendship and explains differences for women who are married, widowed, never-married and divorced. While the organization attracts women of different life styles, all have a shared interest in outdoor activity, adventure, and being with other women of similar age and circumstance. Friendships developed over the course of a decade are primary factors for the group's survival, as well as a unique style of leadership tailored to the physical, social, and emotional needs of the group. This study also addresses social science arguments used to explain aging. Specifically, these are disengagement, formal and informal activity, and socialization. The study concludes with directions for further research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I gratefully record my obligation to all those who contributed to the successful completion of this thesis. My committee members Debra Shogan, Sharon McIrvin Abu-Laban, and David Whitson offered constructive criticism, provided expert guidance, and were always enthusiastic and encouraging.

I am especially indepted to Sylvia Evans and the Trekkers, who, without hesitation welcomed this amateur outdoors woman to share their activities and record their experiences, observations, and memories. Indeed, their lives are testimony to the richness of women's friendships throughout the life course.

My own friendship networks and close family ties were most instrumental in the completion of this project. Thanks are due in particular to Lorne Seaman and Kate Witte who spent hours making my computer program "user friendly" and printing the document.

Finally, I extend most sincere thanks to Michael Jansson for his assistance and support throughout the entire project.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This research is intended to provide a "window" into the lives of a group of elderly women by exploring, in a direct way, their recreational activities and friendship patterns. By investigating informal social networks and support systems within an intimate, first-hand context, a richer, deeper understanding of the aging process can be realized. Although aging is a uniquely different experience from one person to another, it is, at the same time, marked by major life course events and role transitions common to most people. Aging is also structured by gender and economic status. The realities and constructs of aging are, therefore, sociologically based, the result of a complex interplay between individuals and society (Riley, 1988:41).

The women in this ethnographic study belong to an outdoor recreation group called the Trekkers. All over the age of 60 years, they meet once a week to cross-country ski and hike in and around Edmonton. Several times a year, they pack up their sleeping bags, food, and equipment and embark on five-day overnight outings throughout the province. In addition to outdoor activities, the group is also environmentally focussed, with a deep commitment to the

preservation of the environment. Although the organization welcomes both men and women, the bulk of the membership consists of women. The study was started in May 1988, the result of an interest in major role transitions faced by women as they age and the role of friendship and recreation within this process.

Purpose and Significance of this Study

The purpose of this study was to try to understand the meaning of friendship and recreation from the standpoint of a group of elderly middle-class women engaged in an outdoor activity. In addition to quantitative information, I wanted to `know' -- from the native point of view -- what it is like to be old in a culture which emphasizes youth, and to be alone in a world which places such high status on having a partner.

The implications for understanding the dynamics of friendship and support are becoming increasingly evident as the population ages. It is a well established fact that the number and proportion of individuals in Canada and the United States over 65 years is increasing. Statistics Canada (1986) reports that between 1981 and 1991 the population aged 65 years or more will show an average annual increase in size of three per cent, while the entire population will be expanding at a rate of one per cent per year. Women account for a rising proportion of the population as age

increases, with mortality rates accounting for this imbalance. Canadian females can expect to outlive Canadian males by approximately seven years (Statistics Canada, 1985). Since women traditionally marry men older than themselves, the majority of these women will be widowed. In addition, a small but increasing percentage of the female population over 65 years will be comprised of women who have never married. Further to this, the current trend of "baby boomers" to have fewer children means, in turn, that there will be fewer people to provide support when that generation reaches old age. There will also be fewer grandchildren, siblings and cousins. This decrease in family size emphasizes the importance of nonfamily social relations; those who have developed social skills, particularly in the area of friendship are likely to fare better during old age (Chappell 1986:74).

The Trekkers are significant for study because their activities, hiking and cross country skiing, provide an excellent forum for the expression of friendship in conversation and shared activity. In addition, the organization of the group is entirely administered by the membership, without outside professional involvement. It is self-perpetuating. Recruitment is by word of mouth through friends and acquaintances. Hence, the energy, and indeed the ongoing existence of the group, is maintained primarily as a result of friendship and shared interests. The

Trekkers are also appropriate for social research because members represent a broad spectrum of major role changes characteristic of aging. For example, while the majority of women are widowed, several have never married, and a few are currently married and participate as couples. Meanwhile, some women have worked outside of the home in a variety of capacities, while others have been full-time homemakers. Most members have children; some, however, do not. More detailed discussion of the socio-demographic characteristics of the membership appears in chapter two.

As well as the characteristics of the organization and its membership, the Trekkers are particularly interesting for study because hiking and skiing are not typical activities for their age group. McPherson (1983:418) indicates that most people over sixty-five years prefer recreation activities which are sedentary in nature. The very old, meanwhile, are inclined toward solitary rather than group activity. These activities take place indoors and are home-based rather than community-based. Typically they include socializing with friends and relatives, watching television, gardening, reading newspapers, and contemplation. The activities of the Trekkers (hiking, skiing, and overnight group outings) cannot, therefore, be considered typical of the elderly population, particularly for people over 75 years of age. Understanding the role that friendship plays in motivating some women to take up new

forms of physical activity, including skiing and hiking at such a late stage in life is particularly significant.

Physical health is the "single most important contributor to the quality of life for elderly women" (Gee 1987:40) and the best predictor of overall well-being (Himmelfarb 1984:844). Given the importance of physical health and social interaction for the elderly, this exploration of friendship within the context of an activity program is prudent both as an attempt to further academic understanding concerning women, aging and informal social supports from a qualitative perspective, and also in the possibility of practical community recreation application.

The Study Questions

Rather than a formally constructed hypothesis, the purpose of this research is to provide a detailed ethnographic description which addresses elements of theory. Five questions provided the basic framework and direction.

These questions are:

a) What is the meaning of friendship for a group of elderly women?

b) Do social networks dissolve with pervasive role changes, or do they adapt with change: are there friends for different purposes, to meet new needs?

c) What factors draw these women together to participate in an unusual outdoor recreation activity?

d) What are the differences in friendship patterns between these elderly married, divorced, never-married and widowed women?

The Methods

Qualitative methods including participant observation and conversational interviews were used in this study. It is important to mention that, while knowledge is traditionally seen as testing and documenting, Jerrome (1981:181) advocates that the proper role of the research worker and goal of his or her efforts should not be "extractive" but "mediative." In other words, information should be shared. Over time, as I came to be accepted into the group, I shared my interests and observations concerning friendship and aging. In support of this mediative approach, Jerrome quotes Meyerhoff, (1980) who suggests that informants can provide a check on the validity of the researcher's findings by corroborating insights and confirming or disputing hypotheses. They are, after all, the expert representatives of their own culture.

Plan of the Thesis

The remainder of the thesis is organized on the following basis. Chapter two provides a description of the Trekkers and details the methodology. Researcher acceptance,

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observation techniques, as well as the interview format and techniques are discussed. Chapter three is a review of the literature concerning aging and women's friendships. Both chapter four and chapter five give the research findings. Chapter four deals with the club origins and the common factors which draw the women together. Chapter five gives the in-depth evidence from conversational interviews. The meaning of friendship is discussed particularly as it applies to women with differing life styles. Chapter six summarizes the research, including research limitations, conclusions, and new research directions.

CHAPTER TWO

DESCRIPTION OF THE GROUP AND METHOD OF STUDY

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a profile of the membership and to describe the qualitative, ethnographic methodology used to investigate the group's experiences and friendship patterns.

Who are the Trekkers?

The 1989 membership list indicates a total membership of 76 individuals. Fifty-four are listed as single females, two single males, and ten couples. Of this total, 25 members, the majority of whom are single females, can be considered "active" in that they participate in the weekly and overnight excursions on a regular basis. The others do not attend for reasons of health or because they have relocated. These people still keep active memberships by paying a yearly fee of $4.00 and receiving the bi-annual newsletter. All the active members are over the age of 60 years, the oldest purported to be 90 years (she declined to give her age).

Although no formal assessment of socio-economic levels was undertaken, informal observations showed this to be a broadly "middle-class" group of individuals. Their homes ranged from one bedroom apartments in senior citizens' high

rises, to detached two story single-family houses. The homes that I visited were comfortably furnished and immaculately clean and tidy; family pictures were visible and ornaments and trinkets were displayed on coffee tables. There were no identifiable signs of poverty in these surroundings nor any sense of financial hardship.

Interviews and informal discussions during outings revealed teaching, nursing, and secretarial work to be the most common professional backgrounds. Those with children had, for the most part, "stayed at home" to raise their families, while their husbands pursued professions. Recreational activities included travel (both within Canada and abroad), church groups and choirs, gardening, visiting family, shopping, sewing, and involvement in senior citizens organizations including the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired. Most of the members were in good health and able to take part in the outdoor activities with relatively little difficulty. A small number were slowed down because of heart problems, cancer treatments, and the effects of various operations.

<u>The Importance Of Qualitative Methodology and How It Was Used To Study The Trekkers.</u>

Ethnography was the method chosen to explore friendship patterns within the Trekkers. Since friendship is an emotional issue, without universal meaning, the methodology called for a sensitive, "three-dimensional" approach. To

understand the meaning of friendship in the lives of these elderly women, it was important to listen to the women's first hand accounts of their experiences and to observe social interrelationships from the stand point of an active participant. Spradley (1979: 5) describes ethnography as

> ...this concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand...systems of meaning constitute their culture; ethnography always implies a theory of culture.

Observing a culture's behavior, as well as its customs, objects, and emotions is the core of ethnography. The real essence of this method, however, is to go beyond mere investigation, to discover the meaning that individuals "assign" to these objects. Spradley states that the ethnographer "observes and records emotional states, but goes beyond them to discover the meaning of fear, anxiety, anger, and other feelings" (pg 6).

He further explains that ethnographic research is akin to symbolic interactionism, a sociological theory which explains human behavior in terms of meanings. Essentially, the theory explains that individuals act toward things on the basis of their inherent meaning; this meaning is derived from and arises out of social interaction. It is further modified through an interpretive process based on broad cultural principles. The ethnographer, then, goes beyond what is seen and heard to infer what people know. These

inferences are made by listening to what is said, watching behavior, and studying artifacts and the ways in which they are used (pg 9).

Spradley (1979) argues that until recently, ethnography was applied in the study of non-western cultures while the merits of studying our own society were often forgone. This occurred because of the assumption that western cultures shared a common set of values within a homogeneous culture. However, it has become "increasingly clear that people who live in modern, complex societies actually live by many different cultural codes" (pg 12). Ethnography is a powerful method of understanding the complexities of modern life and exploring how people with different perspectives interact.

In support of ethnographic methodology, Gee and Kimball (1987:14) argue that intimate meanings and shifting patterns of friendship in the lives of the elderly are best served with an interactive, naturalistic approach. Most research, however, has emphasised the quantity, frequency, and proximity of the networks of elderly people, rather than the quality of these relationships (Lowenthal and Robinson 1976). Despite this emphasis on quantitative research, Conner, Powers, and Bultena (1979) found that the number of social connections and the frequency of interaction did not have a significant impact on life satisfaction. There is a need, therefore, to shift away from "how often" and "how

many" to the meaning of social relationships and the process of interaction. These authors explain:

> Concern should be focussed more on identifying personal needs that are met by interaction, the meaning attached to various social relationships, the extent to which social relationships are substitutable, and the circumstances under which substitution can and does occur.

They do not advocate abandoning typical quantitative approaches, but suggest, rather, that it be "balanced" with questions that elicit perceptions concerning the meaning and significance of social interrelationships. Matthews (1986:235) concludes that

> by using a qualitative approach to data collection and by focussing on friendship, an area of social life for which transitions are not obviously normatively or socially determined, the agency of social actors is not only respected, but emphasized.

Support of Qualitative Methods From A Feminist Perspective.

Since women are more likely to reach old age than men, the study of aging is very much related to women's issues and concerns; after all, women will continue to comprise the majority of the elderly population. Gee and Kimball (1987) discuss three issues relevant to the study of aging as it affects women.

While they do not support the argument that women have been neglected in the study of aging (Burwell, 1984), they state that there has been a tendency to neglect important

research topics in favor of issues that reinforce stereotypical views of women. Also, the bulk of research literature makes generalizations from male samples to the total population. The result of this emphasis is the assumption that male behavior is the "norm." Subsequently, attention is diverted from issues of gender differences "and the unique aspects of aging for women" (pg 13). They also point out that the majority of studies related to women and aging treat women as a homogeneous group: issues of class and ethnic differences are simply not addressed.

In terms of methods used in the study of women and aging, Gee and Kimball (1987) advocate "more naturalistic" qualitative methods, "sometimes viewed as `second class' methodologies by `real' scientists" (pg 13). Women, they state,

> ...define their social world in a way that emphasizes the quality of interpersonal relationships -- a dimension that tends to be overlooked in more rigorous, quantitative methodologies. (pg 14).

This research then, is an attempt to pay attention to voices that are not usually heard. Shogan (1989) suggests three broadly defined phases in the development of feminist contributions to traditional disciplines. The first phase critiques the absence of women's experience from records of human culture. The second phase documents women's experience in an attempt to alter this omission. The third phase addresses our understanding of "disciplines",

practices, and institutions and ultimately a change in the ways in which these are experienced" (Pg. 1). By recording the recreational experiences and friendship patterns of this group of elderly women, this research supports Shogan's second phase of feminist research contribution: it is an "active" attempt to document women's experience "so this deletion does not continue" (pg 1). Qualitative methodology, characteristic of some feminist research, provides an effective vehicle for understanding the meaning of social relationships and recreation from the intimate perspective of the Trekkers. Conversations, for example, brought to life terms of endearment, expressions of empathy and concerns for the future. As well, the meaning of collectively preparing meals, recalling childhood memories, or warning each other of hidden obstacles on the trail were effectively captured through qualitative methods. In terms of accommodating theoretical work on women and aging, the intent of this qualitative research was to generate theories from data and to provide a detailed ethnographic description involving elements of theory revealed through the writing.

Entry to the field and researcher acceptance.

Burgess (1984:45) states that gaining access is an "essential phase of the research process." It is a prerequisite as well as a pre-condition for conducting research, influencing data reliability and validity. He also suggests that the "points of contact" which the researcher

has with the group will influence data collection and the subsequent perspective that is portrayed.

I initially became aware of the Trekkers through a faculty member from the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, who is related by marriage to the group's leader. Following a phone call, I was informed by my professorial contact that Georgina Andrews would agree to meet me as long as I did not mind "following her around the garden while she weeded." She was busy preparing for an out-of-town trip with the Trekkers, and time was at a premium.

After meeting me at the door of her home, a stately mansion built in the early 1900's, she showed me to the living room, which was filled with family pictures and memorabilia. I explained a little bit about myself, in particular my course work and the area that I was interested in researching: friendship patterns of elderly women involved in outdoor recreation. I emphasized that women who have undergone major life changes as the result of widowhood and retirement were of particular interest. In turn, Georgina explained the origins and purpose of the organization, and she described the membership. It was a friendly conversation, and afterwards she invited me to join the group the following Friday for an excursion to the Devonian Botanical Gardens. I was to wear comfortable walking shoes, and bring my lunch.

During this initial trip, Georgina introduced me with the explanation that I was a student "studying recreation and seniors; she wants to know how we do things." Twelve members took part on the trek, and everyone appeared to be satisfied with this brief explanation. Occasionally, as the weeks went by, individuals would ask "what exactly is it that you are studying," to which I would reply "recreation, senior citizens and how groups like this work." Sometimes I explained that I was interested in women's involvement in recreation groups, and occasionally I mentioned friendship patterns. I found that the more I came to know the participants, the more comfortable I felt explaining that I was interested in social relationships, changing roles, and recreation activity. Throughout the course of my involvement with the group, noone indicated concern or discomfort with my presence. In fact, several respondents mentioned that it was good to have a "young" person along. They also inquired as to whether I would remain with the group after the research project was completed. While my involvement with the women was not covert in any sense, my presence as a research student reinforced the fact that I was "not one of them" and served to distance me to some degree. Comments such as "how's the student doing today?" and "when are we going to be able to read your paper?" were delivered frequently. I was always however, greeted with smiles and made to feel welcome and included.

Burgess (1984) found in his study of a British boys' school that access occurred throughout the research process. Similarly, while I gained initial access to observe and record the activities of the group as a whole, interviewing individual participants later on required additional access permission. All of the respondents wanted to know what it was that I wanted to talk about. Several indicated concern that their comments would not be of any interest. "What interest could a person from the university possibly have in their lives," they queried. I explained that I was interested in friendship and recreation and the role it plays in the lives of women who have undergone major changes in life. Only one woman of the twelve refused to be interviewed with the explanation that she was "too busy" and did not see herself free in the near future. Although she would not consent to a formal interview I conversed with her informally as she was always agreeable to chatting with me on the trails.

Observation techniques

Two techniques characterize ethnographic research: participant observation and intensive interviewing. Both were used to explore the friendship patterns of the Trekkers. As a participant observer, I actively took part in the outings, watching behavior patterns (particularly in relation to friendship) and later recording notes. I tried to immerse myself both physically and psychologically in the

world of the women, in order to try to see the world through their eyes. Burgess (1984: 92) suggests that the participant observer needs to "blend into the situation" to observe participants in their natural setting. The objective is to cause as little disruption as possible. He explains:

> Essential to this method of investigation is role taking and role making which influences the degree to which the researcher participates, the relationships that are developed and the data that are collected.

I therefore assumed the role of a Trekker, dressing similarly to the others, wearing running shoes, slacks, nylon jacket and a back pack with the club's insignia. At meal times I ate at their pace (which was much slower than I am accustomed to). On the trails, I kept to the same pace, trying to imagine what it would be like to have physical ailments such as coronary heart disease or cancer, both of which require strong medication. On a skiing trip, I wore ear muffs padded with tissue in order to experience hearing difficulties. On another occasion, I encouraged a friend's mother to take part, not only because I thought she would enjoy the Trekkers, but also because I wanted to observe how new members are welcomed and to later record her comments. I tried to imagine an existence with large stretches of free time, occasional contact with family members, and the death of close friends. In other words, by observing, partici-

pating and contemplating life as an elderly woman, I tried as much as possible to understand this culture from the participants' points of view.

In addition to observing behavior and activities, I also examined data collected from in depth interviews, newsletters, photograph albums, post cards, newspaper articles, and the club diary, which is a handwritten account of the overnight treks starting in October, 1976. Yin (1984:90) argues that multiple sources of evidence "allows an investigator to address a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and observational issues." He adds that conclusions drawn from multiple sources of inquiry present a type of triangulation drawn from converging lines of inquiry. The end result is that findings are likely to be "more convincing and accurate." During the treks, jottings were made in a small note pad, the details of which were recorded immediately following the excursions. As well as recording information about the activities, I kept notes on conversations, seating arrangements, hiking and skiing configurations, expressions of emotion, questions addressed to myself, and my own feelings. Initially these field notes were quite broadly based, but as time went on, they become increasingly focussed to issues of social interrelationship and support.

Interview format and technique

Interviews "help the researcher to gain access to situations that through time, place, or situation are `closed,' states Burgess (1984:106). While gathering a significant proportion of the data through participant observation on the treks, the in-depth evidence was gathered as a result of unstructured, conversational interviews.

Twelve women were selected for interviews on the basis of (a) marital status (three women were married, three were never married, four were widowed, and two were divorced);(b) the fact that they were active participants; and (c) agreed to be interviewed. Length of involvement with the Trekkers varied from a few months to several years. During these interviews, respondents recalled their experiences and shared their feelings about friendship and aging.

Before the actual interview, I shared personal information about myself, describing my course of studies and my interest in women and aging. In terms of the actual interview, I explained that there were a few topics that I would like to cover; there were no right or wrong answers, but rather that I was interested in their recreation experiences, friendships and their thoughts as widowed, never- married, divorced, or married women. I encouraged them to speak freely, even if they thought I might not be interested in what they had to say. Perhaps it is noteworthy that all of the women expressed surprise that

their lives could be the source of interesting research material. Finally, they were assured that whatever they said would be held in confidence; that the use of a tape-recorder was solely for my own purposes as a memory aid; and that, although the information was for a research document their names would be changed. The interviews lasted between one and a half to three hours and were conducted in their homes. Most of the informants seemed happy to talk at length, while a few seemed fatigued after about an hour. While this was the formal length of the interview, it should be mentioned here that there were many informal conversations over the course of a year and a half which supplemented the formal interviews. These conversations served as a confirmation and modification of ideas as suggested by Meyerhoff (1980). I asked questions concerning three major areas: recreation, friendships in the life course, and perceptions on aging.

Burgess (1984:111) suggests that interviewers need to "monitor their own comments, gestures and actions as these may convey particular meanings" which could advance or impede the interview. These suggestions were also strongly reinforced in a graduate-level methodology course taken prior to the field work. Overseeing my own comments and body language, however, presented an impossible challenge, particularly as these were conversational interviews, the very nature of which implies a certain rhythmic sharing to the discussion. It seemed a contradiction on the one hand to

call an interview "unstructured and conversational" and on the other to constantly monitor and guard one's involvement and contribution. Therefore, after the first interview, I tailored my own style to the situation (some women brought out photographs, served tea and showed me around their homes), personality, and comfort level of the respondents. As conversation is an act of sharing, I divulged information about myself. In particular, I shared the experience of recently losing my father and the impact that this loss had on my mother. I also talked about raising children and going to school. This gave me a common footing particularly with the widowed women (when there is more than a 25-year age gap, conversing about emotional experiences and needs can be awkward and stiff). While I tried to balance my own involvement with as much objectivity as possible, I also found it important to monitor the direction of the interview: encouraging the women to talk at length also meant that I had to guide the conversation back on track from time to time, without appearing to be disinterested.

Spradley (1979) identifies three types of questions which are crucial to the unstructured interview; they are descriptive questions which give the informant opportunities to describe activities; structural questions which reveal how knowledge is organized; and contrast questions which indicate the meaning of situations particularly in comparison to other events. I used these types of questions

throughout the interviews, and I consistently probed for more information in their own terms. Descriptive questions included, "Can you describe for me a day with the Trekkers?" and " how would you describe the people involved with the Trekkers?" Structural questions included, "What are the recreation activities that you take part in?" and "What sort of things do you talk about when you meet your friends for lunch?" Finally, contrast questions included "What's the difference between new friendships and those you made when you were a young woman?" and "How would you compare your church group friends with your Trekker friends?" In order to analyze the interview data and to facilitate comparisons from one interview to another, the tapes were transcribed to manuscripts.

Summary

The Trekkers are a middle-class group of women with similar backgrounds and interests. The majority have at least completed high school. Participant observation and conversational interviews, two characteristic features of ethnographic research, were used toward understanding the lives of these women, in particular their social networks, patterns of friendship, and recreation interests.

CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF SUBSTANTIVE LITERATURE ON WOMEN, AGING AND FRIENDSHIP

A review of the literature consistently confirms the importance of social interaction in the latter years. Indeed, it is well established that throughout the life span, from birth to old age, social support and interdependency are integral components of the human experience (Abu-Laban, 1980). In terms of the elderly, a number of studies show that happiness is positively associated with interaction with friends (Hochschild, 1973; Blau, 1973). Friendship contributes to positive mental health and life satisfaction (Candy et al 1981; Jerrome 1981; Kivett 1978; Miller and Ingham, 1976; Turner, 1981) and also serves as a buffer against losses typical of aging (Lowenthal and Haven, 1968). Morale is also significantly affected as a result of social support and friendship (Tesch and Whitbourne, 1981). "One of the most interesting findings to emerge from the studies of widowhood adjustment and morale is the primary importance of contact with other widows," states Connidis (1987:90). In a British survey of people over the age of 75 years (the majority of whom were women), Abrams (1980) noted a widely held view that "having

good neighbours and good friends was the surest basis for a satisfying life...followed by the frequent admission that they lacked such "good neighbors and good friends" (pg. 5). Bennett (1980) posits that the presence of a friend can make the difference between independent living in the community and institutionalization.

The Importance of Health and Women's Friendship.

Health has the most significant impact on the elderly woman's ability to participate in social life and maintain friendships (Connidis, 1986). Indeed, health is one of the most important resources for social engagement (Liang et al., 1980). Physical incapacity negatively affects the elderly woman's ability to contact her friends and therefore function optimally in a friendship role (Arling, 1976). Chappell (1986) suggests, however, that the health status of elderly persons has been primarily concerned with the presence or absence of disease and the degree of functional ability or disability. Rather, discussions of health should include mental, social and subjective aspects. In terms of care for the elderly, she argues that the widespread belief that families and friends do not provide for each other is unsubstantiated. "Interactions and relationships are preserved and developed, and most care for elderly members comes from informal sources, both family and friends" (pg. 87). She also suggests a paucity of research in the area of friendship and the provision of emotional and instrumental

support. The area of informal social support, she advises, will become increasingly more important for the elderly in general and women in particular.

Friendship Differences Between Family and Peers.

Friends may "be more significant in the lives of elderly women than has been previously supposed" state Gee and Kimball (1987:95). They cite a Winnipeg study by Chappell (1983), in which elderly respondents reported that activities with non-family peers were more satisfying than activities with family. These findings are further supported by Lee and Ishii-Kuntz (1987), who found that interaction with friends, neighbors (to a lesser extent), and voluntary associations are significantly related to decreased loneliness and higher morale. Interaction with kin (in this case, adult children and grandchildren) had no such effects. Friends and neighbors have a greater effect on morale and offer more satisfying relationships than family because friends share the same generational experiences. In addition, friendships are voluntary rather than obligatory (Arling, 1976; Bengston, 1975). In a study of 409 elderly widows, Arling (1976) found that friendships and neighboring are more satisfying to the widow because these relationships are based on common interests and lifestyles. Family ties, however, usually involve different concerns and interests. Further, friendships develop voluntarily and are characterized by reciprocity, the equal ability to share

assistance. Family bonds however, are typically characterized by feelings of formal obligation, dependency, and role reversal between the adult child and elderly parent. Arling emphasizes that even though the parent and child are aware of

> and in many instances deeply concerned about each other, they encounter difficulty truly sharing their experiences or empathizing with each other (pg 766).

Hence, while widows have frequent contact with children and other family members, contact with age peers, who are able to share life experiences, most significantly and positively effects morale (Connidis, 1987). Similarly, Blau (1973:67) states that friendships are achieved rather than ordained. Friendship, she argues, is most significant in old age. Following retirement and widowhood, the elderly woman needs to establish relationships with age peers who are part of a similar frame of reference, sharing the same needs and concerns. A generation gap between old and young means different life styles and few common threads. Additionally, feelings of obligation are not compatible with open communication and intimacy.

Blau explains:

> Because friendship rests on mutual choice and mutual need and involves a voluntary exchange of sociability between equals, it sustains a person's usefulness and self-esteem more effectively than filial responsibilities.

Friendship and Social Status Similarity.

Verugge (1977) reports that the more similar people are, the more likely they will meet and become friends. There is a strong proclivity towards status similarity; therefore, the less similar two people are in social characteristics, the less likely they will become friends. This balance in friendship is referred to as homophily (Hess, 1972) and includes similar values, interests, conversational patterns, economic position, as well as personal and historical experiences. These characteristics lend ease and comfort to relationships (Roadburg, 1985). There is also an important instrumental component to friendship and the aging process. Peer friendships are important in the process of socialization to old age because they impart instrumental knowledge: aging friends look to each other for indirect aid in the form of support and self validation (Jerrome, 1981: 177). She states:

> Aging people look to friends for direct aid, in the form of behavior cues and sanctions, and indirect aid which consists of support and permissiveness in trial and error learning, validation of self, and ritual observance of achievements. Friends provide protective isolation in managing confrontation with the wider society.

Similarly, Lesnoff-Caravalgalia (1984) cites Bandura (1977) who suggests that learning is based on modeling, vicarious learning (seeing others perform threatening

activities without adverse consequences), and verbal persuasion (Pg. 158).

Sibling Friendships and Old Age

Gold (1987) argues that much of the sociological and psychological literature on aging has been directed towards intergenerational relationships and emotional needs. She suggests a lack of attention to "the nature and significance" of sibling relationships and the place of these relationships in the social network of the elderly. Further, existing research concerned with social relationships and siblings has traditionally concentrated on quantity of interaction rather than quality. Her research reveals increased awareness by elderly people of the importance of sibling relationships in the aging process, as well as feelings of closeness to individual brothers and sisters. Her respondents recognized, as they grew older, the importance of having brothers and sisters. While there is little empirical research about late-life sibling relationships, she cites a study by Allan (1977) which showed that the interest in brothers and sisters continued into old age, despite little face to face contact. Allen (1977) also found that sisters shared stronger affectional ties than brothers or cross-sex pairs, lending support to Troll's (1971) earlier research. Martin Matthews (1986) also substantiates the finding that siblings, especially sisters, play an important role as confidants and sources of social

support in widowhood. Hochschild (1973) found in her study of a community of elderly women, that sibling bonds can be socially prescribed; they do not have to be relationships between actual siblings. Hochschild's work is discussed in more detail later on in this review.

Friendship and Role Changes Characteristic of Aging

Pervasive role changes, characteristic of aging, underscore the importance of social support and friendship in later life. They include launching children to lives of their own, retirement, and the loss of spouses to death (Matthews, 1979).

The empty nest, or postparental stage, has been thought of as a traumatic role exit for women (Connidis, 1987). Research shows, however, that for most women it is seen as freedom to experience new activities, as well as freedom from financial responsibility, restricted mobility and housework. While peer friendship is not specifically addressed in relation to children leaving home, the fact that there is more time to pursue activities neglected in the child-rearing years, probably means there is more time to cultivate friendships. In citing Borland's (1982) research on the empty nest syndrome, Connidis (1987:61) suggests that since elderly women "prefer intimacy at a distance with their children, it is not surprising that the empty nest does not appear particularly disruptive."

Retirement is another major role exit typical of aging. It is also an area in need of more research, since that which exists focusses primarily on the effects of retirement on males (Connidis, 1987). Gee and Kimball (1987) state that a concern about women's retirement is that it may result in a contracting social circle. They cite research (Jewson, 1982; Depner and Ingersoll, 1982; Fox, 1977; Keith, 1982) to show that this is not necessarily so. Both men and women, in fact, retain long-term friendships into retirement. Retired women have informal support networks similar in size to those of housewives and employed women. Retired women in comparison to housewives, are likely to belong to more formal organizations. These structured activities might provide retired women with sense of continuity with past work through social contacts and the opportunity to exercise work skills.

In her prolific research on widowhood and support systems, Lopata (1971, 1973, 1978, 1987) emphasizes the significance of peer support in coping and adjusting to the loss of a spouse. Resources from which supports are drawn depend on the society, community, and personal characteristics of the widow. She recognizes personal resources to include health, material possessions, self-confidence, the ability to understand and take advantage of societal and community resources, and the network of children, relatives, friends, co-workers, co-members of voluntary associations,

and neighbors. These resources, she states, facilitate the widow's re-engagement into the mainstream of life following what is an emotionally shattering event for many women. In her study of Chicago-area widows, Lopata (1973) observed that friendship and membership in voluntary organizations were more characteristic of middle-class than working-class widows. When the period of intense grief ended it was the more educated and middle-class women who were able to develop new support networks and lifestyles. These women had broader ranges of options than their "less well-positioned counterparts," who experienced social barriers due to lack of education, understanding of the community, as well as health and financial problems (pg 12). Middle-class women were more able to build social lives around a job, family, and friendships. Less educated, lower-class women usually "lack the social skills required of volunteeristic engagement in organizations" and are not generally aware that they can make friends in later life (pg. 13). A positive correlation between education and coping ability in widowhood is further supported by Harvey and Bahr (1974) who found that widows with more education had more money and were also more likely to maintain memberships in formal organizations.

Friendship and `Rolessness'

Rosow (1967:252) suggests that aging, in particular retirement and widowhood, parallels emotional stress because

it is a time of "rolelessness" in which life becomes "essentially vague, devoid of socially defined objectives...." He describes five conditions which confront the individual as she ages: the exclusion from significant social participation; systematic status loss; inadequate socialization concerning aging; unstructured lives, and the deprivation of a social identity because of role loss. Accordingly, Blau (1973) argues that widowhood and retirement are "roleless statuses" because they are without socially prescribed functions. In the same context, Dulude (1978) states that numbers of friends decrease with age; most old people find it difficult to find new friends to replace the ones they have lost. Long-standing friendships weaken with passing years (Riley and Foner, 1968).

Other research, however, states that aging is not a time for social disintegration. It is marked rather, by the development of new activities and friendships tailored to changing circumstances (Adams 1986). There is involvement in "new, active, dense, local networks", giving women the opportunity to be involved with the larger society, resulting in a positive effect. Adams, also states that women have different orientations toward friendship. While some regard it as an intimate relationship shared with only a few people in the life course, to others it is more inclusive: friends are, in fact, "those with whom one currently spends time" (Pg 60). She suggests that it is the

latter, secondary orientation toward friendship, rather than the intimate primary type, which involves the elderly woman with the larger society, thereby contributing to psychological well-being. Similarly, in their study of social networks and social supports, Wellman and Hall (1986) found that the loss of community for the elderly is "not true." Personal ties in old age "flourish and provide supportive ties to almost all members" (pg. 191). Ferraro, Mutran, and Barresi (1984) contend that after widowhood some types of activities are augmented while others are disaffiliated. In particular, there is a decrease in formal activity participation, while relationships offering intimacy and support are more likely to be increased. They explain:

> Thus, rather than conclude that life events reduce social support, it seems more appropriate to conclude that most individuals experiencing life events such as widowhood compensate for the loss in certain realms of social integration by augmenting their relationships in other dimensions (Pg 254).

They further suggest that the capacity to substitute certain types of social participation for other types is mediated by health and socioeconomic resources. A study by Roadburg (1985) found that the proportion of respondents who believed that friends became more important with aging increased with the age of the respondents.

Friendship and Differing Life Styles.

In the study of friendship and aging, it is important to recognize that women are not a homogeneous group. Gee and Kimball (1987) express concern that there exists a "theoretical impoverishment" concerning variations among women. The bulk of comparative research, they suggest, relates to differences between men and women. While they recognize the importance of such comparisons, the study of variations among women in terms of life styles and subsequent experiences of aging is equally valuable. They state:

> A focus on variations, which in our opinion is the largest gap in the existing literature, will not only open the door for theoretical insights and refinements, but will also represent a major step in dismantling the largely implicit assumption that women are a homogeneous group in society who experience aging, both objectively and subjectively, in a similar fashion (Pg 109).

Perhaps it is useful to mention here that the literature categorizes women as married, never-married, single, widowed or divorced. The situation of women in common-law marriages, or those who live with other women is not addressed. There seems to be an implicit assumption that women who have never-married are also single, when, in fact, two women could live together and share their lives, both of whom have never married.

With regard to the never-married elderly and their friendship networks, there is very little research effort. Abu-Laban (1980) suggests that there has been a "virtual neglect" of those who fall outside of traditional couple/widowed life styles. O'Brien (1987) argues that even though there is growing research interest in women who have never-married, questions related to how they have coped with singlehood over a life time, and how they have handled life changes, aging in particular, have not been addressed or examined. Caplan (1985:8) adds her concern to the lack of research concerning women: "singles are rarely studied by social scientists, who instead emphasize participants in the normal state of marriage." The feminist movement, and its emphasis on the freedom to choose not to marry, has allowed women to become increasingly aware of how much they have to gain from friendships with other women. Gubrium (1975) suggests that the never-married lead lives of relative isolation without experiencing long term, intimate relationships. Rubenstein (1987) however, argues that the view of the never-married elderly as a "social type" is unfounded. His data suggests that the never-married elderly are not necessarily socially isolated, may experience some loneliness, and do suffer from the effects of loss in later life (pg. 108). In terms of women living in either common-law or lesbian relationships, there is also very little information (Gee and Kimball, 1987). It i known,

however, that lesbian relationships, particularly among older women, are usually monogamous and long-term (Lewis, 1979). Relationships between married and non-married women, meanwhile, show differences. Peer relationships are more extensive among married than widowed persons, both in the number of peer friendships and also in frequency of contact (Booth, 1972; Berrardo, 1967). For the widowed woman, contact with widowed friends significantly affects life satisfaction, "while contact with married friends has a small but negative impact on well-being" (Connidis, 1987:90). The end of a marriage through death or divorce often displaces women from the friendship networks they were part of while married (Lopata, 1971: Hess, 1972).

Ethnographic Research and the Study of Friendship

While there is a growing body of factual information concerning women, friendship, and aging, a review of the literature indicates a paucity of ethnographic studies. Although the aging female population is steadily increasing, The Unexpected Community (Hochschild, 1973) is the only major work which specifically addresses social interrelationships of elderly women. Two other significant ethnographic studies, Living and Dying at Murray Manor (Gubrium, 1975) and Fun City (Jacobs, 1974), address social relationships, but do so from the perspective of both men and women. Still, these studies must be included for discussion because they clearly illustrate the meaning of

social communities from the intimate perspective of the participants themselves.

While employed as a recreation co-ordinator at a low-income apartment complex on the shore of San Francisco Bay, Hochschild takes her readers into the world of 43 elderly women residents: "conservative, fundamentalist widows from Oklahoma and Texas and other parts of the Midwest and Southwest" (Pg xiv). As the title suggests, the study concerns the existence of a group of people living together: a viable, complex community held together with fierce bonds of comradeship and "family" loyalty. Through participant observation and conversational interviews, she uncovers and analyzes the meaning of their social world. Characteristic of ethnographic methodology, Hochschild attempts to understand the behavior of the respondents through their eyes: the focus is consistently directed to the way the women interpret experiences and construct reality. She repeatedly attempts to dig out the participants' unique construction of reality: "What was going on? What meaning did this activity have for the people involved?" (Pg 39). She describes a hierarchical ("poor dear") social order, living quarters, favorite television shows, as well as activities and daily comings and goings. Most importantly, she clearly illustrates the meaning of roles and relationships through observation and brief conversational extracts, liberally sprinkled throughout the study.

The social arrangements, she found, were divided into two major role systems: formal and informal. These systems were defined by the design of the apartment building. Formal roles involved work and rewards (for example, arts and crafts projects to raise money) and took place downstairs. Informal roles, which overshadowed formal, were centered upstairs and included a network of friends who visited back and forth in their apartments. Most friendships developed as neighbors and were confined to specific floors. Women who had friends on other floors also had friends outside of the building; "That is, the wider one's social radius outside the building, the wider it was inside the building as well" (Pg 51). As well as social visits, neighboring was also a way of conveying information and misinformation, detecting sickness, and exchanging favors. As was mentioned earlier, Hochschild found a horizontal sibling bond based on similarity (having the same things to offer and comparable needs to meet) and reciprocity (in the form of equality). She explains:

> There was something special about this community, not so much because it was an old age subculture, but because it was founded on a particular kind of relationship, the sibling bond (Pg 63).

Hochschild suggests that there is a link between the sibling bond and social trends. She suggests that this link is marked by three occurrences: as the rate of social change

accelerates, the more society becomes age stratified: increased age stratification leads to a larger pool of potential social siblings. These pools can coalesce into peer communities. She explains:

> The sibling bond is delicate and emerges only when conditions are ripe. Rapid currents of social change lead to age-stratification, which in turn, ripens conditions for the sibling bond. Tied to his fellows by sibling bonds, an individual is cemented side by side into an age stratum with which he shares the same rewards, wants, abilities, and failings (Pg 69)

Living and Dying at Murray Manor (Gubrium, 1975) explores "the social organization of care" in a nursing home from the perspectives of both clients and staff. As a participant observer, Gubrium spent several months on the site in a number of capacities, including a ward aid ("toileting" patients) and a gerontologist at staff meetings. The physical setting and daily routines of all those involved in the home are described in detail. The author talks about "bed and body" work and the rigidity of work routines including awakening, dining, treatments, and bathing. All aspects of life and death in a confined setting are explored. The sum total presents a rather bleak picture: the work routine always takes precedence over quality of life issues. Patients have virtually no independence, suffer lack of privacy, and live in a climate of

endless monotony; meal times punctuate the day and provide the only relief from hours of boredom.

Even within such a rigid, mechanized setting (life runs according to the hands of the clock), deep friendships were forged between patients. These friendships often started as the result of seating arrangements in the dining room, sharing a room or meeting at an activity. Gubrium distinguishes between two kinds of friendships: client-to-client, the most common; and client-to-staff. Client friendships were sometimes formed outside the manor. The "migration-like process" of the elderly to the home meant that former acquaintances could re-establish their friendships. If, however, one did not meet up with old friends or did not frequent public places (for example, recreation activities and church services) and was without a solicitous roommate, it was also likely she would be without friends. Gubrium describes these patients as social isolates, seen as "strange" by the others. They spent most of their time alone in their rooms, sitting and staring. Since they revealed little about themselves, their seclusion generated tales about the motives for, and the probable history of, their isolation (pg. 117). Those with friends, however, considered friendship to be a precious commodity. Since they spent most of their waking time together (roommates were seldom ever apart), a change in these ties meant a major change in their lives.

> I have witnessed the slightest affront between friends at the Manor result in a great personal crisis. Until matters between them are resolved, they may feel depressed and frighteningly lonely. Some totally resign themselves to such lethargy that they make little or no effort to accomplish routines of daily living. When one's world is as small as the floor of a nursing home and its relevant inhabitants are limited to a few friendships, a broken tie may temporarily collapse it all (Pg 118).

The collapse of these friendships often occurred without so much as a second thought by the administration who considered patient relationships superfluously. Sometimes friendships were severed in the reassignment of rooms which was done unwittingly because the administration lacked insight into the social needs of the patients.

Friendship ties between patients and floor staff were rare, he states. Those that did exist, however, were generally between patients and aides. Bedridden patients, as well as those who were otherwise dependent, sometimes became attached to a particular staff member who "is so nice to me." If these ties flourished, then the staff member spent extra time with the patient, talking and performing other favors including allowing the patient to smoke in her room and to use the staff telephone (pg. 118).

Life in a large retirement community in the western United States is the focus of Fun City (Jacobs, 1974:73). The author states that ethnographic studies of the elderly

in natural settings is "conspicuously absent" from gerontological research.

> Without such descriptive material we cannot proceed scientifically -- that is, describe and classify phenomena by their common characteristics so as to be able to link them conceptually into a consistent and parsimonious system of explanation that will provide for understanding and control.

Although Jacobs does not explain his participant observer role, his findings concentrate on group activity patterns within the complex and a description of the residents who participate. The setting is particularly important to understanding the culture. Fun City is described as an activity and age-centered, planned community of 5,600 inhabitants located in a "warm valley in the west." From his description, Fun City appears to be anything but fun. Rather, it is eerie and desolate, largely due to residential streets, "the width of four-lane highways," devoid of traffic and "immaculately clean." Row on row of neatly kept bungalows, with painted crushed rock gardens lined these empty streets, while the houses "show no signs of life." In fact, according to Jacobs, if one were to view the community from the air, all the late model cars parked in the driveways give the appearance of a "cleverly camouflaged used car lot" (pg. 1).

Fun City offered a wide variety of planned, structured recreational activities for a carefully screened,

homogeneous community of white, middle class retirees. In fact, the Fun City News, a weekly community newspaper, listed about 150 separate social events that took place each week. There were also 92 different clubs and organizations. Despite the abundance of clubs, planned social events, and a large shopping complex, Jacobs found that relatively few residents ventured outside of their homes. The "active minority," he concluded almost always consisted of the same people, while the in-active majority were secluded away, alienated and lonely.

Jacobs found in fact, that Fun City, touted in the advertising brochures as a safe, secure haven for "fun in the sun" was in actuality a sterile, isolated, and lonely environment. It was a "false paradise," far removed from the "diversity of persons, opinions, and behaviors that one encounters in the world at large" (pg. 83). The major expectation of the residents was "not giving offense" and "getting along" (pg. 73). Fun City's geographical and social isolation was a result of

> the superhuman effort on the part of residents to reduce conflict to zero through segregation by age, race, and income and the mechanisms for not giving offense. Every effort is made to make Fun City peaceful and friendly" (pg. 83).

The extraordinary efforts to make Fun City a peaceful, friendly place to live, skirted the fact that one setting could not possibly meet all needs. Most importantly, Fun

City was based on the assumption that elderly are a homogeneous community who collectively seek serenity and security to the exclusion of all else. These assumptions failed to recognize differences between individuals and groups based on different cultural backgrounds, work experiences, life styles, expectations, and predispositions (Pg 83).

Summary

The literature, consistently confirms the importance of friendship in the lives of elderly women. Indeed, friendship contributes to overall well-being and provides a buffer against losses typical of aging. Sound health, as well as network of peers of similar social status are also significant factors.

The literature, however, does not address (at least in any depth) differences between women whose life styles fall outside of the couple/widow scenario. Research efforts, in fact, paint the life-styles and experiences of elderly women with a broad brush: the voices of those who do not fit the familiar and comfortable are waiting to be heard. This research (albeit in small measure) is an attempt to describe patterns of friendship from an ethnographic perspective, found lacking in the literature. Although the Trekkers were a white, middle-class group of women there were, nevertheless, important differences.

CHAPTER FOUR

PATTERNS OF FRIENDSHIP FROM A GROUP PERSPECTIVE

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a description of the Trekkers, particularly the way in which their activities facilitate social interaction. The first part of the chapter consists of the club origins and organizational structure. Accounts of two overnight outings taken from the club's diary (recorded by a long-term member) as well as my own observations from Friday outings taken during 1988 - 1989, are provided. In the second part of the chapter, specific activities which facilitate social interaction are discussed. Common factors which draw the women together are explained with reference to existing research theory. These factors are outdoor activity and adventure; concern with physical health; peer group involvement; and, finally, the informality of the organization and its inherent leadership style.

Club Origins.

Initially, the outings were activity based, with a focus on wilderness survival as well as hiking and skiing. Although the bulk of the membership was comprised of women, the treks were led by a man. A strong educational component still exists, but the character of the group has evolved and changed. Today, it is led by a woman. While hiking and

skiing provide the impetus for being together, the opportunity for social interaction with friends who have come to know each other through the years is equally as important, and can be seen, in fact, as a characteristic feature of the oganization.

The organization began in 1976, the outcome of a search for new programs for seniors at Grant MacEwan College. Originally called "Mountain Experiences," the program was led by a senior citizen with a knowledge of the wilderness and outdoor activities. The group travelled by bus, on loan from the college, to the Alpine Club House at Canmore where they hiked and skiied. The club diary indicates that the first three-day outing was a daunting experience for some of the members.

> David Stephens was leader and Fred Hanson was second in command. The first day out John took the lead and to we beginners it was like the charge of the Light Brigade. We went at the back of the Lodge and climbed a very step hill and many of us wondered, but in due time a lunch break refreshed everybody.
>
> October, 1976

During the second year, Georgina Andrews, an avid hiker and skiier, and member of the Alpine Club since World War Two, was invited to assist with the treks. She suggested that the group embark on regular weekly treks around Edmonton in addition to the overnight outings.

The second trip to Canmore took place in March 1977, followed by trips in June and July. Through word of mouth, the membership increased so that by March 1978, a total of 20 participants travelled to Canmore for a five-day outing. Ten years later, the club newsletter indicates a total of 60 memberships. Of the 16 participants on the first hike to Canmore in October, 1976, two remain active in the organization. The dairy entry of November 1986, states that nine members have died; another member died in August 1988. The 1989 membership list records a total of 76 members.

In 1976, the itinerary expanded to include five-day trips to the Kananaskis, Fairmont, Mount Robson, Drumheller, Mount Assiniboine, and Hinton. A trip co-ordinator is assigned for each trip and is responsible for the bookings and fees. Transportation is arranged through car pooling with passengers paying the driver a small fee to cover expenses. The same car pooling arrangements are made for the Friday outings as well.

Organizational Structure

The infrastructure of the organization consists of a president, vice-president, secretary-treasurer and a program committee. An annual meeting is held in January during which the new slate of officers is elected. These meetings, held at the Lions Senior Citizens Recreation Centre, are informal and friendly with the business at hand expeditiously carried out. Membership costs $4.00 and a two-page newsletter,

giving details of forthcoming trips, meetings and brief notes of interest concerning various members is distributed in the fall and spring. Two semi-annual dinners are held at the Beverly Crest Motor Hotel, attended by both active and non-active members. During this time, and on other occasions where there is a large turnout, Georgina usually takes the opportunity to make announcements concerning future trips, as well as museum exhibitions, upcoming films, lectures, and public hearings concerning environmental issues.

Overnight Excursions

The following account of a September 1978 outing, taken from the club diary illustrates the routine and activity of overnight excursions. One of the members is responsible for the diary. If she is unable to attend, someone else provides the information.

Groceries are usually taken along, depending on the type of accomodation. While each participant is responsible for her own breakfast and lunch supplies, the evening meal is prepared collectively. The menus for this meal are planned approximately two weeks prior to departure. The participants are divided into groups, each responsible for the preparation of one evening meal. If bedding is not provided, sleeping bags are taken along.

> Left Edmonton at 12 noon Friday, Sept 15, headed for Canmore Lodge and Lake O'Hara. The evening at the Lodge was livened by twenty-five young German travellers who had a fine time on into the early hours.

We left the Lodge at 5 a.m., dark as pitch - made our way to the parking lot at the Banff Station where our "caravan was formed". We drove on to Lake Louise where we were picked up by the Lake O'Hara bus at 8 a.m. Quite a performance getting our own gear and all food etc. packed on the bus. Number 1 tragedy - Irene's sleeping bag was missing. The bus took us up to Lake O'Hara campsite - David and Georgina met us with a hearty welcome to Lake O'Hara. We had a 1/4 mile hike to the Alpine Hut - a new experience for some of us back packing our own supplies. After two trips each and assistance from a few extra hands all our goodies were at the hut. A work party had arrived at the hut which caused "organized confusion" for the next 24 hours. Insulation and ceilings were put in place over our heads - tables were stripped for new covers, benches were piled on the bunks. Dust flew, strips of plastic floated at will. Chairs were pushed every which way, I was cold and uncomfortable - rather a sad "set up" for our initiation to O'Hara Hut. On Sunday we hiked around Lake O'Hara - truly "the Jewel of the Rockies" - we went on and had tea at the Lodge and enjoyed the comfort and warmth of their lounge. Throughout all the confusion and a fair bit of complaining, Georgina retained her calm, relaxed manner. In due course our dinner was served and everyone was bedded down comfortably.

First we had a visit from "a rat". Georgina armed with a broom went into the kitchen. The dialogue followed: "Come on out, I've had enough of your intrusions," then, "Oh what a cute little face you have." The rat withdrew cautiously and Georgina went off to bed. In the a.m. the warden caught and put that particular rat in a cage and transported it elsewhere. The "Snorers Symphony" was something special. Harold had the answer - he just turned off his "hearing aid and slept peacefully. Sunday morning dawned not bright and shiny but better. After a hearty breakfast we set out for Morning Glory Lakes - one at a very high altitude - the others looked like a chain. A fair number of larches wore their golden dresses - peaks were snow covered - a few wild flowers still bloomed among the wild moss. Eight of us went on to Linda Lake with Muriel Harmon - a steep climb for about 500 feet - then very woody after we left the lake. A nice lunch break at Linda Lake then back by a fairly easy trail to the camp-ground. Again we stopped at the Lodge for tea - then home - where peace and quiet reigned. A fine supper of

chili and cole slaw served by Georgina and Annie. Sunday evening - the "walls of Jericho" went up for wash-up hours.

Monday a.m. Weather looked better - another hearty breakfast and plans were made for the day. Gloria left us early in the a.m. to go back to Edmonton with her daughter. We climbed to Schafer Lake - quite a steep climb larches in fall color - ice on the lake and meadows still blooming near the lake. We climbed up to a view-point, but the clouds thwarted our view - however glimpses of the magnificent mountains were at times enhanced by the clouds. Made our way back to the meadows for lunch. Came down a different route across a rock slide - super views of the Hidden Lake, Lake O'Hara and Mary Lake. We had some interesting companions in the annex - a very fine Australian couple and a Scottish couple. These "residents" had the visit of a pack rat too - joys of mountain-huts.

Tues. Morning dawns bright and clear at 7 a.m. the moon was shining full over Mt. Oderay while on the other side of the sun rise was showing its tents of gold and and pink. We set out about 9:30 and hiked part way around Lake O'Hara - the reflections were superb. You could almost think the mountains had tumbled into the lake. We left the lake and began our climb up and up. In the odd place where the water had run over the rocks and frozen it was extremely slippery. We climbed over rock slides and up narrow steps - ever picking our way very carefully. We had our lunch at the second lake - the venturesome group went on up to Lake Oesa - two lakes beyond our lunch stop. The scenery was simply marvelous, towering peaks, glaciers, frozen waterfalls which periodically break off and tumble down in avalances. No one could visit this area and sincerely say "there is no God." The trip down was less arduous - the sun was shining and we all felt very pleased with our efforts as "climbers". Georgina said that climb was the last type that could be done without ropes etc.

Wed. A reasonably sunny day and we set off for Oderay Plateau - we hiked up the Schafer Lake Road - passed the larches in full fall colours. We left Schafter Lake road and went on up towards Oderay - this climb was less steep and we reached Oderay in about one and a half hours. We had a beautiful sight - it seemed we were on top of the world and felt as though we could reach out and touch the glacier. The viewpoint is called

Prospect Point which commands a view of Morning Glory Lakes and Linda Lake all surrounded by majestic snow-capped mountains.

Thus. Sept. 21 Not a very promising day - weatherwise - but we set out for Opabin Meadows. We hiked around Lake O'Hara and then a very steep climb through the woods to Opabin Meadows - we crossed a busy little stream and then circled Opabin Lake and on up to a rocky ledge where we lunched. These rock slides are awesome - tumbled into all shapes - such huge slabs. During lunch we sighted two marmots in the distance. On our way down we followed along a creek where an enormous slab of rock made up the river bed. The trip down as always was easier. When we reached level ground we hiked around Mary Lake - another gem of the Rockies. We stopped at the Lodge for tea - a brief stop at the wood-pile and on home to the hut. Snow began sifting down in the evening-four additional hikers came in to share our fire and then to the annex. Three young fellows had stayed over the previous night and gone on a very difficult climb up the Grassy Ridge on Wiwaxi. We became concerned as it became stormy, but they arrived back safely.

Friday We awakened to a white wonderland - during the night about 10 inches of soft pure white snow had fallen and continued to fall throughout the morning. I must mention here that O'Hara Hut has a few unique characteristics - the main hut houses 14-16 comfortably. There is room for seven up and seven down in the "bunk area" - the living room dining area has a heating stove, easy(?) chairs and two long tables for dining, card playing etc. The kitchen has a sink, a wood-burning stove with an oven that left much to be desired - a work table and storage shelves completed the kitchen area. There is no electricity - gas and coal oil lamps are used. The "running water" - flows from a tap a hundred yards or so from the hut. Sometimes the area around the tap can be very slippery and a refreshing dip can go along with the chore of carrying water. The "facilities" are situated 1/2 block from the hut and one must cross a little stream on a narrow log bridge - fine on a dry day, but a little touchy when ten inches of snow lie about. That Friday morning was quite an experience as all the chores were done with snow and slippery conditions abounding. However, we donned extra gear and went for a hike around Lake O'Hara - it was another scene of beauty with the fresh snow

> covering the trees and edging the streams in "natural ermine". On our return to the hut we found a party of ten or so had arrived from Calgary. Due to the bad weather and crowded conditions we decided to pack up and go out while the Lodge Bus could get us down to Lake Louise. We somewhat resembled the "flight into Egypt" only more heavily laden. However we had super drivers and arrived safely. We found cars intact though almost buried in snow - a car in the lot had been badly mauled by bears - we felt quite lucky to have escaped. Shortly after leaving Lake Louise we ran out of the storm, by the time we arrived in Banff it was clear and cool.

Weekly Excursions.

The following accounts taken from my field notes, illustrate the agenda and activities typical of weekly outings. The group meets every Friday at 10 a.m. at the parking lots of either the Lions Senior Citizens Club on the north side of the city or the southside Edmonton Co-operative Store. From here, transportation is shared. Clothing of course, depends on the season. In the summer, sun hats, hiking boots, and back packs with the club's insignia -- a hiker against a back drop of mountains -- are worn. Several of the members take along walking sticks. Packs are worn during ski excursions, and picnic lunches are also taken.

Since joining the group, I have skied or hiked at Miquelon Lake, Pidgeon Lake, Hasse Lake, Nakamun Lake, the Glendale Golf Course, The Blackfoot Grazing Reserve, and Elk Island National Park. Homes and summer cottages are also included on the itinerary. Depending on the length of the

excursion, the group returns home by 3:30 p.m. in order to avoid the afternoon traffic rush.

August 5, 1988. Lake Wabamun.

Four members met at the Lions Club: Georgina (74), Muriel Harmon (90), Alberta Cranwood (86), and myself. Georgina explained that several members had phoned to say they would not be able to come. Mary had flown to New Jersey to take care of her dying mother and make arrangements. Harold, had to stay at home to wait for news of impending foot surgery. Alberta showed up, to Georgina's delight. "Good for you, Alberta!" I sat in the back of the car with Alberta. Georgina drove with Muriel Harmon in the front. We wore rain jackets and back packs. The women took walking sticks.

Alberta explained that she is busy moving from her home into a two-bedroom apartment on Saskatchewan Drive. Her grandson is helping her. Apparently the apartment has underground parking; she expressed concern about manouvering the car herself, since it is large and awkward to park. A school teacher for 30 years, she joined the Trekkers eight years ago at the suggestion of a friend. She is also involved with the Baptist Church, where she helps out twice a week. Alberta indicated she is happier with the Trekkers under Georgina's leadership than David Stephens's. "He'd

take us off somewhere and say, "Ok, now you're on your own. Oh no, I didn't care for that at all," she said.

We parked at the Y.M.C.A camp and went for a short hike. The weather was cloudy and quite humid. Georgina suggested we search for an interesting trail she knew about. There was no hurry, however, and as we strolled the women pointed out tansies, wild morning glories, fairy bells, and daisies. The mosquitoes were thick. After setting off down a few wrong trails, Georgina announced that the trail was overgrown and that we should go instead to the Gerard cabin. Dr. Gerard is a retired University of Alberta Geology professor. He and his wife are friends of both Georgina and Muriel. After about a half hour walk, we arrived at the cabin. Dr. Gerard met us at the cabin door. He chatted with Georgina for a while, but did not ask us in. After a few minutes we walked across his property to view the lake. We then proceeded back down the trail to collect the car and carry on to Georgina's family's cabins. Muriel complained that we were not invited inside. "He was not very hospitable, in my mind," she said. On the way down the trail, we ate wild strawberries and looked at various flowers and leaves. After a few minutes, a pick-up truck approached: it was Dr. Gerard. Under Georgina's instructions we stepped well to the side of the trail to give him room to pass by. Instead, he stopped, rolled down his window and apologized for not inviting us inside.

We arrived at Georgina's family cabins a few minutes later and were greeted by her nephew, Paul's, children. Paul invited us in for lunch, but Georgina declined, saying that we had already made arrangements to have lunch in Sara's (Georgina's neice) cabin. Out of hearing distance, Georgina chuckled that she didn't want to be "around all those children." Although the cabin was cold, Georgina declined to light a fire because our stay was only an hour. Muriel forgot her lunch. After some persuasion she finally agreed to share ours.

I asked Georgina why she thought more men did not join the Trekkers. She replied that in her youth men wouldn't go into the bush unless they could shoot or fish: looking at flowers was considered "sissy." She acknowledged that even though things have changed, men are still in a big rush to get somewhere. When she used to take groups on overnight hikes the men would overload their packs and try to reach the destination as quickly as possible. "They'd put their heads down and march. I'd say, "Slow down and look at the birds and smell the flowers." She then recalled a saying her father, who spent time with the native Indians, used to tell her. "You can keep up with an Indian carrying a light load, but not a heavy one. They walk fast because they want to unload their backs." Both Georgina and Muriel talked about their adventures ice climbing and falling into crevices and getting lost in the bush.

On the way home, Alberta and Muriel talked about their relatives in "one-upmanship" tones. "Yes, well I have a niece in Seattle; she told me I can come and visit any time I want to, " said Muriel. Georgina, meanwhile, talked about her nephew, who lives next door to her, and his life as a single parent.

September 9, 1988. Nakamun Lake.

Twenty Trekkers gathered at the Lions Club parking lot. Georgina organized car sharing and gave directions to Hazel McDonald's cottage. There was a lot of chatting and laughter, since many members had not seen each other all summer. They were catching up on the news of past months. In order to give directions, Georgina raised her voice a little and spoke to whomever was listening.

I was assigned by Georgina to travel with Meg and Viola. We had a flat tire on the way out and had to change cars. I ended up travelling with Lillian's sister Laura, her son Jake, and daughter in law, Cloris. Laura and I sat in the back. I noticed that on several occasions they made no response to comments she made and then interrupted her a couple of times, almost as if she were not speaking at all. She did not seem to be bothered by this.

Hazel had coffee and pastries waiting for us. We sat in her kitchen and living room for a few minutes, then

headed out for a hike. As usual, I found myself at the front of the line; we usually walk in single file. This trail was a little wider, so we could walk two by two. I am not sure if I do this without noticing, or if I am intentionally eased up to the front of the line. On occasion, comments have been made implying that, since I am younger, I would probably want to walk faster. Georgina stayed at the end of the trail because her leg had been bothering her. Two other women, who normally walk in front stayed behind to keep her company. Nathen and Molly led. Jake and Cloris walked together; so did Simon and his wife, Lillian. I walked with Laura for a while, (the positions are not ridgidly ordered; people fall to the back or move to the front to carry on conversations). Laura talked about her early days in Turner Valley as a teacher. "It has changed so much now, the old hotel isn't there anymore," she said. She also talked about her grandchildren living one hundred miles away from her but not visiting. Although the return fare is only $31.00, she doesn't see them often, "because they are so busy trying to get on their feet and going through college." These comments were made matter-of-factly.

The day was clear and sunny, most of the leaves were still green. One of the women collected wild asters. Laura pointed out snow berries. As a child, she and her friends would blow them at each other through the stalks of hollow

parsley. Someone else explained that low-lying cranberries are also called mooseberries. Elizabeth Johnston (72) said that she didn't know why she hadn't hiked when she was much younger, since she enjoys it so much. She said it is a shame to find out what one enjoys at such a late stage in life. When asked about travelling she replied, "It's ok if you have the means." Elizabeth joined the Trekkers at the suggestion of a neighbor in the senior citizens' apartment where she lives. She tried cross country-skiing for the first time a few years ago. Even though she felt like giving up she said that her friends encouraged her on; now she enjoys skiing. She also belongs to a seniors' ice skating group. They meet twice a week at the skating rink at the West Edmonton Mall, after which they go for coffee and sometimes breakfast at Zellers. "I like the exercise and the company," she explained. Although her children live in Edmonton, they are busy with their own lives.

We walked for about an hour, then returned to the cabin for lunch. A few others decided to return by a longer route. Georgina, meanwhile, went off in search of a blue heron one of the women had sited on the lake. About half an hour later we opened our back packs for lunch. Some ate inside, while others sat outside in the garden. Couples always sat together for meals.

In the kitchen, over tea, Georgina talked about the marriage of former Trekker and long time bachelor Robert

Emerson and his wife, Jane. She joked about Robert's self-centerdness: "Where's my dinner, Jane." She went on to say that "Jane has her work cut out" handling Robert and his expectations of domestic life. As Georgina talked the women listened and laughed. Even though many of these women lived traditional lives catering to the needs of their husbands and staying home to raise children, they nodded their heads at Georgina's comments.

After lunch and more conversation (Hazel talked about the difficulty of renovating her cabin by herself), Ruth and Mitchell White invited the group to help themselves to beets and cucumbers brought along from their garden. While we were all outside getting ready to go, Georgina talked about the plans for next week's trip. A circle of people gathered around as she talked. I rode home with Simon, Lillian and Meg Tiege. They talked about school days and friends including Georgina, her sister Gay, Ellen Morrison, and Emily from years ago in Tofield. Meg, who is usually quiet on the treks joined in the conversation.

TREKKING: OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROUP SOCIABILITY

Social interaction was a focal point of the organization. Indeed, conversation and group activity was integral to the outings. Specific activities, however, played an important role in facilitating this interaction. These activities were: meeting at the parking lot, trekking, meal

times, "happy hour", a card game called "99," and the two annual banquets.

Meeting at the Parking Lot

As well as the launching site for the weekly excursions, the parking lot provided the setting for giving information and sharing news. For ten or fifteen minutes, members milled around in small groups or in a circle. The occasional new person was introduced by whomever she came with and informally welcomed by the others. Most members expressed polite friendly interest in prospective members without attempting to "sell" the organization. News about other members was shared at this time. For example, conversations concerned someone recovering from surgery, on holidays abroad, caring for sick relatives, entertaining house guests, recovering from illness, or visiting family. Those who had been absent for a length of time were warmly welcomed back with comments such as, "Good to see you back again, Joan. We've missed you." One member, who had been away for several weeks, said returning was "like old homecoming week; they're always so glad to see you." Often, if two or more men were present, they stood together. During the summer and fall, some members brought along fresh vegetables from their gardens to share around. Shortly after 10 a.m., car pooling arrangments were made by Georgina along with directions to the destination. If conversations were

still going on, she talked to whomever was listening, without seeming disturbed at the lack of attention.

Trekking

Depending on the number of participants and the destination, treks were sometimes divided into "fast" and "slow groups," with a designated meeting place at a pre-determined time. The decision of which group to accompany was made individually. The treks usually lasted until noon, then resumed again for about an hour. If the trail was narrow, the women walked single file; wider trails allowed for conversation. Georgina almost always led the way, pointing out various species of plants and flowers. Those interested in what was around them stayed closer to the front, while those wishing to converse strolled along behind, chatting about gardening, their families, or trips they were planning. Sometimes a couple of women would lag quite far behind, engaged in private conversation. Occasionally, Georgina would stop and take a head count to make sure nobody had fallen too far behind. One of the women jokingly replied that the Trekkers should be called the "talkers" instead, "because we yak, yak, yak." Commenting on the speed with which younger hikers travel, Georgina replied, " We've got nothing to prove anymore. We just like to wander and look at the birds and the flowers."

Food, Wine, Games and Song

During the Friday treks, members brought their own bag lunches. Meals were usually eaten at picnic tables during the hiking season, or at someone's home during the winter months. The Trekkers "love to eat," I was frequently reminded. While mealtimes were eagerly anticipated after a couple of hours in the fresh air, the hour also afforded an opportunity for more conversation. Sometimes photographs of previous trips were passed around. While the countryside was always of interest, the focal point was often the women, themselves, skiing in a line or posing with arms linked, smiling and laughing.

Depending on the type of facilities (some places served meals as part of the accomodation), meals on the overnight treks were planned ahead of time and prepared in small groups, with each person responsible for a particular item on the menu. The kitchen became a forum for laughter and conversation, both in meal preparation and cleaning up afterwards. The women also brought along home-made muffins and cookies for sharing.

"Happy hour" was a ritual before every evening meal. Wine and snacks were served at 5:00 pm. During this time, hors d'ouvres were set out, and the evening assumed the appearance of an informal cocktail party. Discussions included past adventures, recounting spills and falls, while members not present were remembered: "What about the time

when...." Sometimes bridge was played, but a ritual card game called '99' usually brought the evening to a close. "You're not a true Trekker until you've played 99," I was reminded on a trip to William Watson Lodge in the Kananaskis. The game lasted about two hours, evoking laughter and shouts.

Music also provided the opportunity for group interaction. During this same trip, three weeks before Christmas, carols were sung in the main lodge; visitors to the facility were encouraged to join in as well. The club diary also lists a number of songs composed and sung by the women. The following song composed on a berry-picking trip to Calling Lake in August 1985, captures this spirit of togetherness.

Calling Lake, O Calling Lake,
It was so great at Calling Lake.
The berriers are busy bees
Almost always on their knees.
The sun shone bright until it sank
And then it rained to fill our tank.
At evening by our fire,
We laughed and yelled at "99."

O Calling Lake, O Calling Lake
Why is it so great at Calling Lake?
Because of fellowship and fun
And berry picking in the sun.
Who minds mosquitos on the bum,
With spray we keep them on the run.
And gourmet meals at close of day,
Make this memorable stay.

Banquets

Two yearly dinners are held in the spring and fall at the Beverly Crest Motor Hotel. They are well attended by

both active and non-active Trekkers. Members dress up, and several take part in a before dinner cocktail hour in the lounge. The rough, truck stop ambience of the hotel seemed an unlikely setting for a group of elderly, middle-class women. The lounge was smokey, and the bar patrons were attired in tatoos and black leather. The women explained, however, that it was a favorite place, particularly as the smorgasborg was reasonably priced and the service friendly.

These banquets provided the opportunity for non-active members to renew acquaintances. They were considered highlights of the year and marked by a large turnout. Approximately sixty members turned out at each of the three banquets I attended. As usual, the majority of participants were women with a sprinkling of couples.

Following the dinners, slide shows were presented depicting past Trekker outings. Georgina made announcements concerning future outings and informed the group about environmental concerns, in particular the development of a highway through Wagner Bog, a natural preserve near Edmonton. In addition, a few moments of silence were observed for a member who had died. Participants were also asked to contact a fellow Trekker who had suffered a serious illness. The evening ended at approximately 9:00 pm.

FACTORS WHICH DRAW THE WOMEN TOGETHER

During the treks, planning meetings, social functions, and conversational interviews, I became aware of

instrumental and expressive factors which drew the women together creating a vital, cohesive whole. These common denominators were a keen interest in outdoor activity and adventure, concern for physical health, desire to be with one's peer group, and the informality of the organization and its unique leadership style. In the following discussion, each factor is described and analyzed in relation to existing research.

Outdoor Activity and Adventure

The women were initially attracted to the club because of an interest in outdoor activity. Since there was no advertising or active solicitation, they usually attended for the first time with a neighbor, relative, or friend. Although their backgrounds were varied, all of the women interviewed expressed a long-standing fondness for the outdoors. Some were raised on farms and in small towns. Others developed an interest in the outdoors through their husbands and family camping holidays. While not all of the women lived on farms, the following statement by a seventy-four year old woman expressed a common sentiment:

> Well, all my life I've been on the farm and I like the outdoors, and for me to get out in the fresh air and join in with the other ones with the same interests, and watch the birds, trees, grass flowers....

Friendship was also facilitated by a shared interest in nature and travel. Members have watched films on Himalayan

mountaineering, Eskimo life, avalanches, and the habitats and behavior of mountain wildlife. Following a film on wolves, a park naturalist took the women out for some practice calls.

> There we stood out on the windswept bank of the river imitating wolves and hoping the wolves would answer. It was a really funny experience. After half an hour or so of getting very chilled we gave up the idea and headed for home and warm rooms.
>
> Jasper Park,
> February 21,1980.
> (Club Diary)

While enjoyment of the outdoors was not a recently acquired interest, hiking (especially overnight forays with friends) and cross country skiing were, for approximately twelve women, first time experiences undertaken relatively late in life. The ability of the group varied from those with considerable experience and endurance, to those who were barely able to shuffle along. While skiing might seem especially intimidating for women in their seventies, peer encouragement, support, and empathy, played an important role in the introduction and maintenance of the activity. A seventy-two year old woman explained her introduction to skiing as the result of a friend's persistence.

> So anyway, after that I found myself out at the West Edmonton Mall buying skis with Nan. But you know, when I got through with these lessons I thought, Oh, I don't know if I'm going to do this. But anyway, there I was and I didn't want to let Nan

> down of course. Because she said, "we will ski, and then we will go out with the Trekkers. I want to see you doing that." And I have often thought of that. The last couple of times we have been out I can see what a wonderful thing it was. But if it hadn't of been for Nan I never would have done it because it wasn't like anything I had been doing in my life.
>
> ---
>
> After my husband died, Mabel took me under her wing. She got me to start painting, and so then we went painting together besides going to the Trekkers. I learned to ski about a year later.

Learning to undertake new activities, supports Jerrome's (1981:177) argument that friends play a "vital role" in socialization to old age. "They impart instrumental knowledge, provide an opportunity for role rehearsal, and set controls on behavior." Additionally, she argues that aging people look to friends for indirect aid consisting of "support and permissiveness in trial and error learning, validation of self, and ritual observance of achievements." Similarly, Riley (1972:11) suggests that friendship and socialization "serves to teach individuals at each stage of the life course how to perform new roles, how to adjust to changing roles, and how to relinquish old ones." Rosow (1974:169) states that the process of resocialization to a new status, as a result of widowhood, divorce, or retirement, is related to the following group functions: new group memberships, a new role set, clear role

prescriptions, positive new reference groups, abundant role models, solid self-images, extremely strong group support and reciprocity. The women in this study proudly refer to themselves as "the Trekkers". Expressions such as "You'll never find a Trekker who doesn't love to eat" or "A little rain won't stop the Trekkers from going out," reinforce this feeling of solidarity and membership with a positive reference group involved in socially valued outdoor activities.

One woman explained:

> The way that people look at us sometimes is really funny, but we just get a kick out of it, you know. I mean, sometimes even when we are going along the highway with the skis on the top of the car: this car full of white haired old ladies. The cars passing us turn around and look ...(laughter)... I feel it's a privilege to belong to them. That's, you know, that's the way I feel.

Even though the hike might only last an hour through municipal park trails, hiking boots and hats are worn. Several women take along their back packs and hiking sticks in preparation for unforseen difficulties (usually hunger, insects, or a change in the weather). Georgina almost always carries a map. Taking extra precaution on these trips might also be related to the physical condition of some of the women who suffer from a variety of physical ailments including heart problems, arthritis, poor eyesight, hip replacements and hearing loss.

Adventure

We're skiing in the rain
Just skiing in the rain
What a glorious feeling
Just soaking up the rain
So wax, stick and slide
Landing on your back side
Keep skiing just skiing in
the rain.

Kananaskis, 1984.

In addition to a love of the outdoors, there was also a sense of adventure which bonded these elderly women together. Whether it was learning a new sport at a late stage in life or embarking on a camping trip, there was a willingness to accept risk for the rewards of unusual experiences. Hochschild (1969) argues that Tallmar and Kutner's (1969) theory that disengagement is linked to loss of roles in aging was not supported in her study of a community of elderly women. All of the residents or Merrill Court had lost roles as parents, and most were no longer married. In spite of these role losses, however, they were not disengaged. The same can be said of the Trekkers, the majority of whom were widowed and no longer raising children. Their loss of roles did not mean diminishment of activity. Indeed, a helicopter expedition to Fort Chipewyanand the following account of a September camping trip to Tar Island near Peace River illustrate a collective appeal for the unusual.

Thursday, September 11, 1986. At 2:00 pm. we gathered at the "Cruise Co. Office". We left our cars in the parking lot and were driven by a

company driver to the river's edge where the launch awaited us. We scrambled in and set off for our 37 mile cruise down river. The landscape was ever changing autumn colors, sometimes high banks and a narrow channel, other places a wide expanse of water and very shallow banks. The trip takes two and a half hours, but that skips by very quickly. We arrive at Tar Island about 4:45 pm. afternoon is cool, but clear and sunny. A flight of steps up from the shore to the bank where the camp is situated. There are seven tent cabins nestled into the trees. The cabins have two beds, a table with a frig and basin -- two chairs complete the furnishings. The plumbing is out at the back among the trees -- well air conditioned.

On our arrival we were greeted by the friendly young.....They had hot muffins and coffee ready for us and we did the lunch full justice. After settling into our respective cabins we all went for a walk around the island. Tar Island is a mile long and about one quarter mile long. Dinner was served in the cosy dining area situated at the end of the kitchen area. We were served a delicious barbecue steak supper complete with all the trimmings. After dinner we went across the river and spent an hour rock hunting-finding some very interesting fossils. A pleasant evening was spent in the warm "rec-shack" playing cards and having a sing song. We were served an evening snack of hot biscuits and coffee. Then to bed - on a cool september night an un-heated tent is not exactly cosy. Plenty of bedding was supplied and we were advised to bring "woollies". We donned heavy pyjamas, sweaters, socks and even toques. We soon became comfortable in our beds and enjoyed an excellent night's sleep. Morning dawned bright and clear. The "morning wash-up" was very brief and everybody dashed for the rec. tent where the old kitchen range gave out the warmth we wanted and enjoyed. A hearty breakfast of orange juice, hot cakes and coffee really hit the spot. After a last round of picture taking we climbed aboard the launch for the return trip to Peace River. This was a "super outing" and should become an annual. Thanks to Judy Doern for discovering and organizing the "Tar Island Cruise".

On another trip to Canmore in July 1977, several members of the group got caught in a severe electrical storm followed by pouring rain. The diary states:

> We slipped and slid our way back to the camp, covered in mud and soaked to the skin. However a hot shower and a good supper put us all back in fine spirits. The next morning we parted again and went on to our homes feeling it's good to be alive in Alberta at 60+

In January 1989, four members of the group including myself, became lost on the Blackfoot Grazing Reserve. As the result of taking a couple of wrong turns, we skiied for two extra hours trying to find our way back to the parking lot. The three members were all over the age of 70 years, and apart from being annoyed, were not afraid or worried, even though one member has a heart condition.

A skiing trip to Kananaskis in January 1985 further illustrates that the activities of this group are not typical of elderly people, the majority of whom prefer more passive indoor activities including watching television and visiting friends (McPherson 1983:418; Statistics Canada 1978; Abrams 1980:9).

> We had plenty of ups and downs but all went well until Jane missed a turn and wiped out to avoid crashing into a tree. She twisted her injured knee and had to limp along until met by a snowmobile. Returning we took Jane to the hospital and we continued on to the club house where we enjoyed an excellent meal of vegetable-beef casserole and cheese cake. We picked Jane up at the

> hospital- she was diagnosed as having a severely strained tendon. We enjoyed a good game of '99' - Jean and Fred, a skiing couple joined us.

The atypical activity that these women enjoy lends support to optimal arousal theory which argues that people are in a continuous process of seeking and avoiding interactions with the environment in an effort to sustain an optimal level of arousal (Iso-Ahola, 1980). Applied to the elderly, the theory suggests that life satisfaction is enhanced through leisure activities which are subject to change and variety (Pg 172). Outdoor adventure is not the only means by which the Trekkers sought challenge and diversity. One could never be sure who would show up at the parking lot. Even though many of the women have known each other through the course of several years, they enjoyed outings with a variety of different friends from week to week. When asked to explain what draws her to the group, one respondent replied:

> Each one has a different little niche in your life I think. Oh, I talk to Velma about something altogether different to what I would talk to Margaret about. Everyone has got something that I would like to pass on to. It's not that I wouldn't tell everybody the same thing, but everybody just seems to draw something out of you altogether different.

Conversations and interviews revealed a consensus of opinion that the eclectic profile of the membership makes it a stimulating organization.

A new member explains:

> Meeting for lunch is always very pleasant. You often sit beside somebody you haven't talked to before. The time we went to Elk Island I sat beside Muriel Harmon. Oh, that was so interesting.

Physical Health

Physical health is the most important contributor to the quality of life (Gee and Kimball 1987:40) and overall well-being (Larson 1978:112) for elderly women. Part of the reason for this, argues Dulude (1987:327) is that many elderly people see their contemporaries incapacitated through physical deterioration and feel "happy that they have themselves been spared." Perhaps most likely, however, is the fact that poor health is a "spoiler" which curtails people's activities and makes them unhappy. Roadburg (1985:152) argues that having one's health is related to independence and freedom, as suggested in the following quotations from women determined to remain physically active as long as possible.

> You get to feel more helpless as you get older. And of course you get apprehensive about what is going to happen to you physically and mentally.
>
> ---
>
> I like outdoor exercise and I think I need it. I have a fear of being

alone when I am sick. So I think for my health's sake I need to do this.

Driving a car, and therefore maintaining independence is contingent upon good health. Although the Trekkers carpool, and some members pick others up, the responsibility for finding transportation to the meeting site rests with the individual. Deteriorating health and the inability to maintain an active driver's license, means the end of trekking for some members. One woman who had been with the club since its beginning was persuaded by her family to sell her home and move into a highrise. Although she was still active, the family anticipated that in the near future she would be unable to maintain her home. With a fear of the underground parking at her new apartment, the woman sold her car. Left without transportation (bus connections were poor), she found active participation with the Trekkers difficult, preferring not to approach individual members for rides. Subsequently, she became more dependent on the telephone and visits from friends.

Those who are able to attend despite their ailments and disabilities are encouraged and made to feel welcome. As a rule details of sickness were not discussed. The subject was dealt with matter-of-factly, and often with humour. For one woman, being with her friends on an overnight excursion, despite a serious illness is clearly illustrated.

I wasn't too well, and I shared a room with Glinnis

> Shortly. She said to Sophie Reese "You know, I used to lie in bed and listen to Angela and expect her breathing to stop any minute." But you know, they put up with that. They didn't say anything; they just put up with it. So being with them and doing what I could and letting them do what they could, that was very comforting.

Bultena and Powers (1978:753) found that physical health and independence are perhaps the most "prized" attributes of elderly people. These attributes also serve to distinguish their lives from other elderly people. They further argue that the "locus of a self-identity allows older persons to psychologically deny the personal relevance of pernicious labels assigned by society to their age cohort."

> Well, of course I think our whole group is not typical when it comes right down to that. You see, my typical idea of a widow is some friends that I have. They love bingo, you know, and of course they play bridge and they don't do outdoor things all that much. I would describe the Trekkers as the greatest bunch of people that you could, you know, get in contact with. Because I think they are all wonderful people.

Kutner (1956:112) argues that feeling old is linked to low socio-economic status. Indeed, health has a "confounding association" with income, occupational status, education, and employment (Pg. 112). Larson (1978)

concludes that in addition to education and occupational status, marital status, availability of transportation, housing, and "nonamorous forms of social interaction" are all related to subjective well-being. The Trekkers are a middle-class group of women. Maintaining physical health, and thereby independence, was consistently reinforced in the perceptions they held of themselves as well as their activities.

The Desire to Be With Peers.

> There is this feeling of fellowship, friendship. I can't put my finger on it, but somehow everybody is together. They have their meals together. They share the same jokes, and you don't get little cliquey groups.

In her study of elderly women in a low income housing project, Hochschild (1973:72) refers to a form of alliance, the result of similar concerns, recollections, and humour. She also found that talking the "same language" in an atmosphere of acceptance and security is a liberating experience: the women feel free to discuss issues, particularly failing health and death amongst themselves. Powers and Bultena (1976) and Stueve and Gerson (1977) also found that friends, because they share a common history as a cohort and are at a similar stage in the life course, are empathetic and a great comfort in giving emotional support. A common history and shared experiences facilitate their friendships. As well, certain situations bring to mind

passed events thereby confirming "the life style, the beliefs and customs on which the old pin their integrity" in a rapidly changing world (Hochschild 1973:75). She explains:

> When the old people were together alone, everyone was a representative of the past, and no one had to instruct or interpret. They felt free mentally to move back a generation and speak of themselves less as grandmothers and mothers and more as sisters and children of their own deceased parents. (P. 75).

Snatches of memory were frequently recalled on the treks. For example, a small lake in Elk Island National Park reminded some women of family camping trips of years long past. One person remembered her mother washing pots and pans in the lake, while another recalled elaborate Sunday picnics in the countryside, for which the children were dressed in white starched cotton. At other times, school days were remembered, while the changing urban landscape often brought back memories. Marshall (1980:118) suggests that "social reminiscence is more beneficial than indvidual or personal reminiscence since it consists of retelling stories about happy events rather distressing times. Participants are rewarded by providing a mutually satisfying way of engaging in a life review."

The women also laughed at similar jokes and found humour in the same events and situations. Sometimes the humour was about their own aging. When asked how she was

feeling after a long absence, an elderly woman replied "well I'm still here." "You're never to old to go pickin' berries," another said, in a play on words. Eating together, celebrating birthdays and sharing accomodation contributed further to ties of friendship and the overall feeling of unity. They also shared similar values, particularly concerning their roles as wives and mothers. Concerning working women with children in day care, a respondent echoed the same view point as her Trekker friends:

> We look upon it as too bad. Too bad it has to be like it is now. You know, with mothers working and the father working...I didn't work outside of the home. My husband wouldn't believe in it. It was a different time because I couldn't do anything that I wanted to except to stay home and look after children. I loved every minute of it.

Through the years, the group has acquired a few favorite places which are popular both for the setting and the rememberence of time spent together. Slide shows of past trips capture this group feeling, as does the newsletter published twice a year. As well as giving details of forthcoming trips, the newsletter also relays information concerning the membership:

> We were saddened to hear of the sudden passing of one of our members, Pauline Sanders, in August. Pauline will be missed by her many many friends.

Interviews revealed that friends more than family provide the main focus of social interaction and activity for the Trekkers. In his study of elderly widows and their families, neighbors, and friends, Arling (1977:766) argues that although research studies indicate a high degree of contact between older people and adult children, this contact is not directly associated with higher morale or greater satisfaction. Even though their relationship has grown out of a life-time association and is characterized by love and devotion, they encounter difficulty truly sharing and empathizing. In addition, when recalling the past, the adult child and the aged parent will have different perspectives because they have been "socialized in different generational age co-horts and they are confronted with separate life-situations as a result of their respective stages in the life cycle" (Pg 766). "The kids are busy with lives of their own," was frequently heard from both married and widowed Trekkers. Although many indicated frequent informal contact with their children, either by phone or visits, none indicated involvement in organized recreation activities together. Normally, Arling argues, the aged parent participates in organizations or friendship groups whose members are of similar age and circumstance.

This observation is also supported by Verugge (1977:576) who found that adult friendships show a strong bias toward status similarity for all social

characteristics. In an informal way, the Trekkers who were socio-economically very similar, provided each other with a network of social support. Thoits (1982) defines social support as "the degree to which a person's basic social needs are gratified through interaction with others. Basic social needs include affection, esteem or approval, belonging, identity, and security." Cobb (quoted in Chappell, 1986:68) proposes that social support belongs to one or more of the following classes:

-- it provides emotional support, that is, the person believes he or she is cared for and loved.

-- it provides information, which leads the person to believe she or he is esteemed and valued.

-- it leads the person to believe he or she belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligation.

Through the course of the interviews, as well as informal discussions on the treks, all of the above characteristics of social support were mentioned. Increased confidence, particularly in acquiring outdoor skills, was frequently mentioned:

> I used to be a very timid person. Really, you wouldn't have believed what a rabbit I was. Since I have got older, I have got out of it. And I'll tell you, being with that group has helped me an awful lot you know, in overcoming my timidity.

As well, newsletters, social events, outdoor activities, and contact outside of the organization (dining at restaurants, taking trips together, and chatting on the phone) were instrumental in making the Trekkers feel that they were part of a supportive peer network of communication and obligation.

Informality of the Organization and Its Leadership Style.

Havighurst and Albrecht (1953) found that social activity plays an important role in circumventing the negative effects old age, in particular, feelings of dis-satisfaction and low morale. Their findings were subsequently confirmed by Kutner (1956), Tallmer and Kutner (1961) and Tobin and Neugarten (1961).

In 1972, Lemon, Bengston and Peterson became the first reseachers to articulate a systematic statement of the activity theory of aging. They argue that "the greater activity, the greater one's life satisfaction" (Pg 515). In a replication of this research, Longino and Kart (1982: 713) found that informal activity contributes positively, strongly and frequently to life satisfaction. They define formal activity as the participation in formal organizations; group meetings with set goals or agenda. Informal activity implies interaction with close friends, neighbors and relatives. Solitary activity is typical of hobbies or leisure activities conducted alone, such as

reading, sewing, writing letters, watching television, or listening to the radio (Pg 714). In terms of these types of activities, they suggest that the greater one's formal activity, the less one's life satisfaction. In fact, Longino and Kart argue that one of the implications of formal activity might be that it "damages self-concept and lowers morale." (.Pg 716). They state that when people in their seventh or eigth decade interact with one another continuously in age segregated settings, systems of stratification occur which reinforce lower self-concept among those who are least functional and independent.

Although these findings are the result of research in retirement settings, they present interesting implications for the Trekkers. As a voluntary association complete with organizational goals, an elected body of officers, and a planned agenda of activities, the Trekkers is by definition a formal organization. However, the intimacy (particularly overnight treks), frequency of the social interaction, and the fact that members were not obliged to attend every outing characterized the organization as informal. Indeed, flexibility was often mentioned as an attractive feature of the club, particularly with regard to health problems and travel agendas. In addition, acceptance, with few questions asked, as well as the lack of gossip and stratification were consistently mentioned as a positive feature.

> Most of them have had more education than I've ever had, but I don't feel

> that I'm not one of them. Most of them are teachers. I've been on the farm all my life, just doing farm work and I've had very little education 'cause my mother died when I was quite young.

The primary source of motivation and confidence was Georgina Andrews, the group leader. An Air Force veteran with considerable knowledge of the flora and fauna of Alberta, Georgina gently prodded the group along, encouraging and waiting for the slower ones, as well as giving instruction and informal nature lessons. Her leadership style was tailored to the unique needs of the group. She utilized a combination of skill, considerable environmental expertise, and an endearing, nurturing personality, much the same as a parent coaxing and encouraging offspring. Although she was not formally proclaimed as the leader, she was unanimously recognized as the central pivot of the organization. This recognition was revealed consistently in the interviews and throughout the recorded history. The following is one of several tributes to Georgina recorded in the diary.

> <u>Song to Georgina</u> (To the tune of Oh Tannenbaum).
> Oh Georgina, our Georgina
> What would we do without you
> Oh Georgina, our wonder grows the more we learn about you
> You lead us through bush and bogs
> Up rocky trails and over logs
> You always know just were you are
> But we'd be lost without you
> Fairmont, 1985.

Georgina's knowledge of the surrounding countryside and her friendly, nurturing personality served to bind the group together in both an expressive and instrumental way. She played an important role in facilitating the women's shared interest in the outdoors and the sociability of the outings. As we walked along she pointed out indiginous flowers, trees, and shrubs; sometimes we stopped to watch birds and study animal tracks. While on the trail, Georgina waited for those who were slower to catch up, occasionally taking a head count to make sure noone was in trouble. At meals, she usually started eating after everyone else was settled. Her leadership style was gentle and unobtrusive, but understood and unanimously accepted, as one member explained:

> She has the ability to accept authority without getting people's backs up. She does it very nicely but quite strongly too. She is also very kind in her way.

Bandura (1969) and Gewirtz (1969) quoted in McPherson (1983:132) argue that social behavior is learned through observation, imitation, interaction, and emotional identification of significant others. As we age, there is a shift from a reliance on compulsory and exemplary role models to a greater reliance on symbolic models and specific role models. These models are voluntarily selected by the individuals from a wide variety of possible choices (Pg 133). Georgina instills confidence in the women by teaching

and encouraging them to undertake new activities, especially skiing and forging trails. She is viewed by the women as a positive role model.

> Georgina is a great one. When you get her off in the bush, she knows every little plant and has to examine it. So we learn something as well as hiking too. She understands about aging because she herself has aged too. She is very understanding of our group.

Summary

The Trekkers are a group of elderly middle-class women. Iinitially drawn together out of a common love for the outdoors, they undertake recreational activities considered unusual for elderly people. Many of these women have learned to hike and ski for the first time particularly as a result of the encouragement and support they give each other. While there are many recreation groups comprised of seniors, the Trekkers are especially interesting because they have existed for more than ten years without outside, formal involvement. Even though there is a formal structure to the organization, it is maintained through strong underpinnings of friendship, support and sensitive leadership uniquely tailored to the needs of the group.

CHAPTER FIVE

PATTERNS OF FRIENDSHIP FROM INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVES

The Trekkers organization provides the opportunity for collective peer friendship and social support based on an interest in similar recreational activities and shared concerns related to health and well-being. Friendship, however, is very much an individual matter and is intimately defined and sustained by the participants themselves. In this chapter I propose to discuss what friendship means to the Trekkers as well as identify characteristic differences in friendship based on varying life styles. From interviews with twelve Trekkers, evidence is given to support research which argues that, while a confidant is an important component of life satisfaction for many elderly women, a broad base of secondary friendships is also important, particularly in coping with major changes. Not all women, however, experience the same life-course changes. Patterns of friendship and social support are characteristically different for women who are married, never-married, widowed, and divorced. This chapter, therefore, is organized on the basis of two areas of discussion: personal meanings of friendship past and present and the characteristics of friendship for married, never-married, divorced, and widowed

women.

THE MEANING OF FRIENDSHIP AND HOW IT CHANGES THROUGH THE LIFE COURSE.

Interviews with the Trekkers revealed a variety of responses to the question, "In your own words, what is a friend?" One woman replied:

> I suppose a friend is many, many things; but I imagine it all boils down to love. Someone, in a way, who reads your mind without you ever telling them what you are thinking.

Another woman described a friend as

> Someone you can depend on. I know that if they say they are going to do something I can depend on them.

While another woman answered:

> When the chips are down they are there to give you what support they can. It's a feeling that goes very deep, I think with close friends.

These definitions of friendship were consistent with life experiences. The first response was given by a woman faced with major surgery. The second response came from a single never-married woman who enjoyed travelling abroad with friends, while the third reply came from a woman in a fragile state of health. In all of the interviews, definitions of friendship were dependent on individual circumstances. For example, a single woman who enjoyed travelling in the company of other single women included within her

friendship criteria a person with similar interests with whom she could depend on. In another case, an elderly woman, disturbed by the loss of friends and siblings to death, and faced herself with major surgery, described friends as people with whom she could share love and who would in turn understand her needs without a great deal of explanation or discussion.

While studies reveal common themes in women's friendship, no singular, all-encompassing definition exists. Indeed, the existence of friendship depends on the "subjective evaluation of a relationship by at least one of its participants" (Matthews 1986:245). Therefore, Matthews argues, the criteria employed to assess friendship varies from one individual to another. These criteria further depend on the circumstances of one's life course and the individual interpretations of them. In all of the interviews, the women indicated that they considered their fellow Trekkers to be friends more than acquaintances. The depth and characteristics of these friendships, however, varied. Some women saw each other only on the treks, while others met regularly outside of organized activities. These women said that they were able to discuss personal matters and to approach certain members with their problems and concerns. One seventy-seven year old, widowed woman, who enjoyed a close relationship with her husband, described her friendship with another member:

> I can talk to Norma about anything. That is what really helps you. To be able to have somebody that you can really say anything that you want to and feel that it is not going to go any further and that they are not going to think less of you for it. There is nothing that helps you more than that.

In the end, the range of responses to the question of friendship was as eclectic as the personalities of the women themselves and was finely woven into the circumstantial fabric of their lives.

Old Friendships

In addition to the fact that definitions of friendship were uniquely grounded within the context of the women's lives, I consistently found a distinction between old friends and more recent ones. For example, a seventy-four year old widow, who spent most of her earlier life in a small town in British Columbia, replied to the question, "Have you made close friends in the Trekkers?":

> Not as close as I have back home. They are friends, but I don't know, somehow I'm not as close to them as I am to the ones back home. I think we all had our problems back then. I am still close to the Trekkers, but in a different way I think.

Matthews (1986:233) argues that there is a qualitative difference between old friends and those more recently acquired. Therefore, in order to understand "at least some aspects of friendship in old age" she suggests that the researcher must have an understanding of the respondent's

relationships throughout her life. She suggests that the unique meaning of friendship is revealed in the analysis of populated biographies, as well as the respondent's interpretations of these events in old age. The end result, she argues, is a richer, more complex understanding of the dynamic nature of friendship as it ebbs and flows through the life course. The women unanimously regarded the Trekkers as friends with whom several shared confidences. While describing friendships throughout their lives, however, all the respondents but one described people outside of the organization as their best friends. This occurred despite the fact that several members had known each other for more than a decade and maintain regular contact outside of organizational activities.

Long standing friendships often meant that individuals named as closest friends were those with whom the respondent had experienced stressful times such as, raising children, surviving the depression years, divorce, starting a new job, or building a home. Friendships made during these times were seen by the women to be the closest and most enduring. A seventy-two year old woman described her high school friendship during the depression in Manitoba. During this time her father was unemployed and her friend's father was dead, leaving the care of five young children to the mother.

> We saw each other every day.
> She lived on one end of the street
> and I lived on the other end. When
> we visited each other we would walk

> to the middle; there was a light standard there. We would stand and talk for about an hour; then we would go home.

When her friend married and moved away the friendship continued with phone calls and letters. Their first visit occurred several years later.

> It was just as if we had said goodbye the night before. Everything just came back. We talked about our school days and of course living on the same street. We talked about our kids and laughed like great fools.

Another woman said that her closest friends were people she met during nursing training at the Royal Alexandra Hospital from 1940 to 1942.

> We had one night (other than our three weeks of holiday) that we were allowed out of the residence. One night a year; I mean that. They are my closest friends, we have always kept in touch. Everybody remembers everybody at Christmas, while some others of us are much closer.

While another talked about lasting friendships made on the first day of work at a downtown department store.

> See, when we first started looking for work we tramped the streets. We went everywhere looking for work, and then when you did get it you were afraid to raise your voice or complain about anything because there was always somebody at your shoulder waiting to take over. You stuck together because you didn't know what you were supposed to be doing. The girls that I started with the same day are the girls that are my friends. We met lots of others during the course of our stay, but it was

> the ones we started out with, at least in my situation.

Elder and Clipp (1988:306), in a study of World War Two veterans, found that surviving traumatic events such as war facilitates "the establishment of bonds that often endure over a life time..." These women did not experience front line combat, but some had experienced financial hardship, isolation, and physical exhaustion. Whether they were trying to scratch out a living on a farm during the thirties, raise children while husbands were away at work or war or help to build their own homes with little outside help, caring and supportive relationships were made during these times and diligently maintained into old age. Letters and Christmas cards were reported as the most typical ways of keeping in touch. Although contact with old friends was often minimal, the depth of feeling remained the same, as this seventy year old respondent explained:

> It is as if you have never been apart; within five minutes it's as if you have never been apart.

In fact, some Trekkers had not seen old friends for several years, but nevertheless these friendships were regarded with significance. Sometimes, long term friendships were initiated through simple acts such as offering a home made pie as a welcoming gesture or washing clothing for a family bedridden with flu. Conner, Powers, and Bultena (1979:120) argue that the quality of interaction, rather

than quantity is the most salient feature of friendship. Circumstance, purpose, and degree of intimacy and caring are more important factors for consideration than how many times social encounters take place.

Accordingly, Hess (1982:159) suggests that the life experience of women equips her to cope with major changes in later life.

> ...the remarkable resilience of older women may have it's roots in their early training in expressive behavior, disclosure, and sensitivity to others...

This observation was echoed in the women's statements. Friendships made during child rearing were often said to be the closest.

> We became good friends because we had a lot in common. We were raising our families together. We didn't have much money, so we would get together and play cards. It was just that we were interested in each other and helped each other.

Hess also suggests that "women's well-developed personal skills" prove an asset in later life, particularly in the death of a spouse and in retirement, when there is a need to reconstruct social networks. As well as providing a buffer against age-related stresses, peer relationships are also "critical in preserving feelings of power and worth in later life" (Norris 1987:72).

Current Friendships

While old friendships, particularly those made in hard times, held special significance, discussions also revealed that a broad base of current friendships were important. As well as involvement in the Trekkers, the women reported active membership -- and subsequent friendships -- in a variety of organizations including, churches, professional associations, book clubs, bowling leagues, travel groups, environmental organizations, and associations catering specifically to the recreational and daily living needs of elderly people. The Trekkers were a busy group of women with extensive networks of friends. The following schedule illustrates the weekly activity pattern of a seventy-six year old woman.

Monday... bowling at one o'clock.
Tuesday...vacuumed house in the morning then
went skiing for two hours.
Visited Space Science Centre in the afternoon.
Wednesday...swimming in the morning;
hair done in the afternoon.
Hockey game in the evening.
Thursday...Canadian Club meeting at noon.
Business and Professional Women's Club
dinner meeting.
Friday...Out with the Trekkers.
Saturday...Shopping. Meet Sandy for coffee in the
morning.
Sunday...Quiet time, reading.

Jerrome (unpublished paper) suggests that the need for shared interests and development of informal relationships within the context of goal-directed activity is a typical feature of the social life of elderly middle-class women.

Attraction for activity reflects a "cultural emphasis on doing rather than being, activity rather than passivity, the attractiveness of purposeful behavior and value attached to it in middle-class culture." Her argument is supported throughout interviews with the Trekkers, all of whom placed value in keeping busy and being involved.

As well as the 'normative' culturally prescribed explanation for the emphasis on activity, Jerrome suggests that there is "another equally more plausible, more practical one" (Pg 13). Some elderly women, she argues, find it difficult to make friendships outside the range of kin and an established circle of friends. The type of "easy sociability" that is available to men in pubs is "denied" to women, while chance encounters at bus stops and stores are transient and probably not conducive to permanent friendships. A widowed member of the Trekkers reflects this observation:

> The thought of me making friends at my age; you don't have the contact. You make friends through your husband, through your children...

Hence, while many elderly women might have the social skills developed early in age to develop new relationships and cope with role exits characteristic of aging (Hess, 1982), the actual opportunity to make friends might be limited, particularly for widowed women whose focus on life was family oriented. Involvement with other elderly women

through community activity is a popular means for making friendships in the latter stages of life.

Adams (1986:60) argues that while some people regard friendship as an intimate relationship shared with a few people in the course of a lifetime, to others it is more inclusive. Friends are, in fact, "those with whom one currently spends time." She further suggests that secondary friendships are more likely than primary (intimate relationships) to involve the elderly individual with society at large. "In other words, a secondary orientation towards friendship enables the older person to remain engaged with the larger society." In her study of seventy white, non married, women sixty-two years and older who lived in Oak Park (a middle class suburb of Chicago), Adams found that while intimate relationships are important to the mental health of older people, involvement in "new, active, dense, local networks " provide the opportunity of meeting new people and acquiring new experiences. She also states that older women with a strict definition of friendship had a difficult time making new friends and replacing those who had died.

As well as involvement in various activities with opportunities for new friendships, another way some of these elderly women have increased their network of friends is by intensifying sibling relationships. Among the approximately twenty-five active Trekkers, there were three pairs of

sisters. Recreation, particularly hiking and skiing provided a forum for the enrichment of friendship between these sisters as they age. One woman remembered her childhood in which sports, outdoor activities and camping trips were a major component. Following the funeral of her brother-in-law in Ontario, she embarked with her two sisters on a car tour of northern Ontario, reminiscing about their childhood camping trips in the family's first car. Although one of the sisters still lived in Ontario, she took part in the weekly Trekkers outings whenever she was in the city.

Sibling relationships based on friendship have a positive impact on morale (Gold, 1987; McGhee 1987, quoted in Connidis 1987). Because same-sex siblings are more likely to share common interests, it is probable that they will consider their relationship to be one of friendship. One of the special social network functions of siblings is providing individuals with the sense that they continue to be contributors to life's tasks (Ross and Millgram, 1982). Connidis (1989:76) suggests that siblings reaffirm oneself as "an object of affection and care; that there are others who still feel fondly about you and who are willing to care for you." She also states that research findings show a closer tie between sisters, than between brothers and sisters. As well, the sibling relationship becomes closer in old age. As other kin die, there results an increased need for closeness (Cumming and Schnieider, 1961; Cicirelli,

1977; Gibson and Mugford, 1986). Sometimes, a history of antagonistic feelings towards siblings changes in old age (Gold 1987: 213). A seventy-two year old member of the Trekkers describes her feelings toward her sister. The two who had undergone a great deal of sibling rivalry and had been on poor terms through most of their childhood and subsequent marriages, found themselves emotionally closer as they aged.

> We were opposites. Once my husband said that she was jealous of me. I don't know if she was or not; but anyway, she seemed to have it in for me for a long time. One time, not that many years ago, she was saying what a wonderful time she had with Mom. This is before I was born. And then she said "You came along and spoiled my life" (laughter).... She lives in Toronto, and once in a while, you know, I get a feeling come over me that I want to see her. It is just a feeling. I feel like that now. If we got on the phone we would run up an awful phone bill, believe me.

At other times, it means assessing a relationship in terms of an increasing awareness of one's own mortality (Gold, 1987). One woman wept during the interview as she talked about the death of her brother and sister.

> I have outlived both of them. I feel a terrible void many times; it just overcomes me at times. I see my own age group fighting with their siblings and it hurts me just something awful. I miss my sister and brother so much; oh, I miss them.

CHARACTERISTICS OF FRIENDSHIP FOR WIDOWED, MARRIED, NEVER-MARRIED AND DIVORCED TREKKERS.

Since friendship is individually defined and constructed throughout the life course, the manner in which it serves as social support depends on the circumstances of the women themselves. In other words, to understand friendship as a form of social support, it is helpful to recognize that life experiences of women are marked by different role changes and exits that are part of aging. In terms of friendship patterns, the never married woman brings to her social relationships a characteristically different frame of reference from that of her married sisters, as does the woman who is widowed or divorced. The following discussion explores these life style differences in relation to friendship patterns in the lives of the Trekkers.

Widowhood

Widowhood is a fact of life for the majority of older women in Canada. The death of a spouse is also acknowledged to rank as one of the most, if not the most, stressful of role transitions (Martin Matthews 1987:233). In a study of recently retired men and women, Martin Matthews (1982) found that the death of a spouse consistently emerged as having the most profound impact of all life events. In fact, it ranked first in a series of 34 life events based on crisis assessment. While the majority of widowed Trekkers were

socially active and had been widowed for at least ten years, the loss was still very real:

> You have a lot of time alone. I mean, I do all of these things, but I am alone. I have to learn to cope with being alone and being happy and content when I am alone. After a trip, it takes me a few days to get used to being by myself again.

Decades together meant a unity in most aspects of their lives, including recreation activities:

> Once we had a car, well that was great because we were out every weekend. I don't think there was much of Alberta we missed. You know, going out weekends and staying overnight; like going for two days.

At the conclusion of an interview, after the tape recorder was switched off, a respondent confided that when she felt especially lonely, she found comfort in wearing one of her husband's shirts to bed. Two other women explained that the overnight excursions provided welcome relief from long evenings and nights spent alone. Sleeping under one roof brings occasional relief from loneliness at night:

> You never saw anybody sleep as quiet as Emmie. She goes to sleep on her back and she never moves. She is the most wonderful person to sleep with.

For some women, even though their lives were filled with activity and social interaction, the death of their spouses meant a contraction in social support systems (Martin Matthews 1987:244), particularly in terms of

friendships with married friends. The women, however, recognized and accepted that a changed status equalled a concomitant change in one's circle of friends, even though they may have known each other for many years as couples.

> Now I know a lot of them have parties and don't invite me. I know that one woman is quite vocal about it...'you can't have too many extra women.' And I know that you can't at a party, but they have been pretty good about trying to include me in when they can. I'm just fortunate that I am included as often as I am, I think. I do try to entertain myself, always feeling that I am not sure that they would want to come.

Collective acceptance that widowhood means withdrawal from certain activities, and a subsequent diminishment of social relationships with married friends, is synonymous with disengagement theory (Cummings and Henry, 1961). The theory argues that aging parallels an inevitable, mutual withdrawal of both the individual and society. The main thrust of the argument is functional: withdrawal is the natural result of declining ability and inevitable death, necessitating the replacement of work roles by younger and more competent individuals. Although the replacement of work roles was not an issue for widowed Trekkers, there was, nevertheless an acceptance that changed status accompanied a social withdrawal from friendships with couples. This was regarded as a fact of life, explained without bitterness or anger. A collective "that's just the way it is," response.

An example of this mutual acceptance was expressed by a married woman who said that it would be difficult to re-establish a long standing card group comprised of four other couples. The group disbanded due to sickness and death. Reforming with single women was not seen as an alternative. She explained:

> I don't know why; we just didn't bother. Of course, if we did we would have to exclude the women who had lost their husbands because they wouldn't want to come alone.

Although all of the widowed women said they had married friends, the majority associated for the most part with those who, like themselves, were widowed. Elias (1977) quoted in Martin Matthews (1987 :242) found in a study of widowhood and social support that the "vast majority" of respondents limited their friendships to other older widows. In fact, in groups where widowhood is relatively rare, a change in status places the individual in a "deviant position" among her peers. Interests and experiences are differentiated, thereby exerting a "detrimental effect on friendship" (Pg 429):

> Beatrice's husband died, I think about 15 years ago. She was the only widow amongst the whole group of us, which I think makes things harder.

Peer networks both within and outside of the organization provided a forum for mutual sharing of experiences "with someone like me." Based on reciprocation and help,

widowed Trekkers were better able to cope with some aspects of life alone. One woman explained:

> This bridge foursome (we are all widows), decided we would meet at night because we don't get out as much at night. Then somebody said "we are tired of sitting home alone eating dinner. Why don't we get together for dinner?"

A small handful of widowed Trekkers, who live in a community outside of the city, meet regularly following the Friday treks for supper at a restaurant. This social outing is an event the women look forward to.

> After spending all day together, you just don't want to go home and end it all.

Married Women

Of ten married couples registered with the Trekkers, four participated on a regular basis throughout the year. Observing married couples, in contrast to women without spouses, was particularly interesting. Occasionally, they hiked along side someone other than their husbands, but for the most part they walked as a couple. They always ate and travelled together. In addition, the men always drove with their wives sitting beside them. On a trip to the Kananaskis, the wives prepared the meals and served them to their husbands, while everyone else fended for themselves. At meetings, they sat together. During the interviews the women frequently used the collective 'we' to explain their friendships and activities which were, for the most part,

undertaken as a couples:

> We swim in the pool out there all summer. We garden a lot and we swim all the time. We go to museums when we can, and of course we are very keen on travelling. We read, and Simon is a very avid photographer.

As well, husbands, were frequently asked to confirm information. While the married women indicated networks of friends, these friendships were timetabled around activities with their retired husbands. One woman explained that since her husband prefers not to travel, she spends time away from him during the summer when he is otherwise occupied.

> He is very happy to send me off. I will happily do that if it is garden time for him, because he just loses himself in his garden. I wouldn't do it if it were any other time of the year.

Married Trekkers followed traditional roles of wives and mothers, raising children and caring for their families. All but one had worked outside of the home. They indicated happiness with their lives and satisfaction with their friendships.

Connidis (1989:15) suggests that marital status is "the central variable in structuring social life." Marital status is also related to both physical and psychological health, with life satisfaction lower for the widowed, divorced, and separated, and higher for the never-married and married. Depression is lowest for the married when compared with the

formerly married and never married (Pearlin and Johnson, 1981 quoted in Connidis:16). In terms of physical health, "marriage encourages behavior that contributes to health and provides support when ill." Marriage in old age is satisfying because there is greater opportunity to share activities and spend time together:

> I have always felt that if I didn't have him to talk to I would miss that an awful lot. Like reading the newspaper and being able to say "Wasn't that a horrible thing," or "Wasn't that a nice thing that happened." If you are sitting alone, who are you going to say these things to.

With less competition from other roles, particularly raising children, there is increased emphasis on affective ties and spouse's personality. Long term marriages also suggest significant agreement concerning in-laws, family finances, choice of friends, recreation, basic beliefs in proper conduct, philosophy of life and affection (Connidis 1989:20). Depner and Ingersoll-Dayton (1985) found that women have a more extensive network of intimate relationships than men, assuming greater responsibility for maintaining family ties and friend relationships. These findings were supported in the course of the interviews; while couples spoke of mutual friendships with other couples, sustaining these friendships was assumed by the women.

> Peter is never one to initiate a thing, bless his heart. He goes along with whatever I plan.

> Often I'll say "Please, say if you would rather not."

Married woman talked of their friendships with other women; however, the focus of their social relationships was with their spouses. Indeed, a husband is a rare commodity in a group, the majority of whom are over seventy years of age. One married respondent jokingly replied that at times she felt as if she ought to "Carry a baseball bat to beat them off." Another woman observed that women alone miss a man with whom to converse. Although her husband chatted with other women on the hikes, particularly about car maintenance, "He always comes home with me," she laughed. While on a car trip, a woman described how she met a man and established a relationship. "It was as if he just dropped out of heaven," she enthusiastically explained to her friend. "You'll meet someone as well Dora. I just know you will," she said. The women also described the fierce competition for the few available (and sometimes not so available) men.

Never-Married Women

> I never married; couldn't be bothered, really. I had a good job in charge of an office. When my sister heard about the job, she said it sounded boring, but I told her that I would be getting two weeks off and raises.

Observations and interviews with never-married Trekkers, who were also not involved in intimate

partnerships, revealed a fiercely independent, physically active, and socially involved group of women. All of the Trekkers interviewed said that they were coping with changes in their lives; never-married women, however, for the most part assumed leadership positions both in planning and implementing activities. They brought to the group years of everyday survival strategies and independent decision making. They conveyed complete control of their lives, an observation supported by Norris (1980: 141)) in a study comparing the social adjustment of single and widowed older women. She found that single retired women were significantly more internal in locus of control and higher in self-esteem than were widows. It is important to state that confidence and locus of control were also evident in several of the widowed and married women as well; particularly if they had held jobs or had undergone periods in their lives when they had to survive alone.

Although the never-marrieds indicated friendships with married and widowed women, most of their friends were other women who had also never married. With a similar frame of reference, they "talk the same language". A never-married woman explained her lack of friendships with married and widowed women.

> They have a lot of different interests than I do. Frankly, I get quite bored. When I go out with them the conversation is "my daughter this" and "my son that". Their conversation is not really in things that are happening like politics or economics,

> or things like that. These are the things that I am interested in, you know, because I don't have a family to be concerned with. Mind you, I have certain nieces and nephews that I talk about, but I don't see that it fits me as much as it does their parents.

Friendships between never-married Trekkers seemed to be more instrumentally based, a factor which was evident on the treks. Never-marrieds were more likely to discuss the surrounding terrain and ecology, while the others tended towards family relationships, group travel, and issues of domesticity, including cooking and gardening.

Social involvement, while important, appeared to be of secondary interest to the never-marrieds. Treks were undertaken primarily for exercise and to observe and study the countryside. Their motivations were more purposeful. This is not to say, however, that the never-marrieds were cold or unsociable; but rather that their purpose was perhaps more focussed. They also revealed, however, plenty of empathy, humour, and responsibility for the other women:

> I think it is important to provide for the women who aren't so energetic. Because getting people out is one of the good things we do really. It is getting people out to enjoy the wilds and outdoors who wouldn't normally do it. People whose husbands were anything but physical are finding that they like to go hiking and so on. Several people have said 'we used to drive through the Rocky Mountains at top speed; never would stop except for gas, never saw anything, you know. What would my husband think if he saw me up on the side of this mountain talking a walk.' So, in a way, it is not only something to do, it expands the horizons for a lot of people.

Never-married women indicated a high degree of social involvement in everything from bowling to environmental advocacy organizations. All had friends seen on a weekly basis. Although the interview took place in March, one woman saved her Christmas cards for display throughout her sitting and dining room. Several months were spent responding, she explained. In addition, when asked to describe a day in their lives, the level of activity was surprising for women well over 70 years of age. These findings contradict Gubrium's (1975) research, which suggests that the single are, by definition, isolated since they do not have the same face-to-face contact with family, typical of married and widowed individuals. Although isolation among never-married women is significantly increased through poverty and low education (Keith 1986), single women of all classes receive far more familial support than single men. Research also shows that, for elderly single individuals, friends assume roles that family members play in the lives of married, divorced, and widowed women. There are, in fact, more ties with friends, making friendship more "crucial" in the lives of the never-married elderly, than family involvement. (Longino and Lipman, 1981). Two of the never married women lived alone, while the third lived with her sister.

Gubrium (1975) argues that "being single is a premium in old age in that it avoids the desolation effects of bereavement following spouse death." While the loss of a

spouse is acknowledged to be a "much more traumatic event than any other which occurs in old age" (Norris 1980:143), the assertion diminishes the importance of friendship relationships in the lives of the never-married elderly (Chappel 1986). Talks with the women revealed that factors, particularly the marriage of friends, carried significant impact:

> Well you know, some of them have married or re-married. You never know, when they are married, which way it is going to go. Like one friend that I was very close to, we were very good friends, but she has gone exclusively with her husband's family and his friends. When Moira Price got married, I was quite prepared for it because I had seen it happen.

Living with and caring for aging parents also provided strong bonds of attachment for the never-married women, which further contradicts Gubrium's social isolation theory. Frequently, these women recalled shared activities and little snippets of conversation (particularly words of advice)... "mother always used to say...." As well as forming strong attachments, parental responsibilities also had an effect in friendships for the never-married women:

> I think that bridge is a great game, but I never had time to do it because of the places that I was working. And then I was also looking after my parents. They were quite elderly. I couldn't take hours off. I could come and go and do things here and there, but I had to be there to cook their meals and look after my father when he was older. So I couldn't go for three hours or something unless it was specially arranged and somebody else took over and all that.

In addition to the loss of friends and parents, elderly never-married women are also subject to the loss of the work role. "There may be as much emotional investment in a career for a single woman as there is for a married housewife in her husband," Norris (1980:136) argues. While there are few consistent findings concerning the impact of retirement on women (McPherson, 1983), never-married Trekkers unanimously agreed that retirement was planned and positively anticipated. In fact, friendships made during the course of a career were still actively maintained, supporting the argument that friendship represents continuity and stability in the lives of the never-married (Connidis 1989:40). I found no evidence that retirement was a profound role loss for never-married women. The change in financial status, rather than the loss of the work role and work mates, was most frequently cited as a source of anxiety.

> My friend is in the same status of life that I am and we feel that the income tax is high. When you have saved your money and gone without, it makes you wonder right now if it was wise. You know you deprive yourself of a lot of things.

Overall, there is a paucity of research concerning never-married elderly people, in particular their social relationships. Singles, are in fact, seldom the focus of

research, replaced instead by participants in the normal state of marriage (Abu-Laban 1980; Chappell 1986). Existing research, however, suggests that women are becoming increasingly aware of the gains to be made from other women; these warm friendships help to relieve potential loneliness in singlehood (Caplan 1985:8)

Divorced Women

Divorce is said to be "one of the most neglected areas in gerontological research" (Hennon 1983: 149). This observation is significant, particularly as data on marital status shows that the percentage of divorced individuals between 65 years and over has doubled each decade since 1951. As well, the number of elderly who are divorced will continue to increase (Connidis 1989:10). Interviews with two divorced Trekkers, one aged 63 years and divorced for 14 years, and the other 74 years and divorced for two years, suggests that, for elderly women the end of a marriage through divorce has far different social implications than widowhood:

> There's not a lot of dignity in divorce, like there is when you are a widow. I was raised in the era where divorce was pretty shameful. It was a very embarrassing thing and so on and so forth.

Hennon (1983) argues that the consequences of divorce as opposed to widowhood are "more severe or different" (Pg 150) because widowhood has a defined institutionalized

status, while divorce has a stigmatized status. Accordingly, widowhood is viewed as a sad experience, while divorce is seen as shameful. In addition, death means that the spouse is only psychologically present, while divorce means physical presence. Miller (1979) posits that divorced women are less satisfied than widows in terms of financial matters, self esteem and interrelationships. Social adjustment to her new role is more difficult for the divorcee than it is for the widow (Kitsen et al, 1980).

The adjustment to divorce is made easier with social support (Rashke, 1977). Divorce, however, often reduces and changes friendship networks, with the outcome that friends might not always be available to provide support (Miller 1979). Both interviews with the divorced Trekkers revealed that friendship patterns had indeed changed, particularly as the result of moving from a world of couples, with the husband's employment as a focal point, to life as a single.

> When we were first married we had a group of friends that we were close with. Through the years, as my husband went up the corporate ladder, our friends changed. A A couple of months after we broke up, I found out I had breast cancer. It was all the old friends who came back to me, the friends we had when we were poor and raising a family.

Hagestad and Smyer (1982) argue that the timing of divorce is related to other issues in the life stage. Some people see it as a reordering of priorities accompanied by a

sense of freedom and the opportunity to realize unfulfilled potential. The following quotation is from a 72 year old woman separated from her husband for more than twenty years. She finally divorced in 1987. She saw separation and divorce as a liberating experience from a seemingly hopeless partnership:

> I'm not proud of it. To me it is not what I'd planned my life to be, but you know, I'm happier, much happier. I'm more active now, and I have more energy too.

She explained that separation led to entirely new friendships based on a new spiritual awakening, not in an orthodox religious sense, but rather a deeper understanding of herself. For another woman, divorce in later life was a devastating experience during which friends were important.

> It was very traumatic. Talk about living one day at a time, I lived one hour at a time.
> Friends helped by phone calls, coming over and bringing me cakes, not that I needed the food, but by being there; continually being there, not just at the terrible moment of crisis or a couple of weeks after.

Both women said that their involvement in the Trekkers provided a means of social support and friendship, particularly as no questions were asked concerning their divorces unless information was volunteered. One woman found that she was viewed as a threat by some of her married women

friends, while the other found that it's often difficult to find a comfortable place in organizations where the participants were all familiar to each other. Both saw the Trekkers as a safe haven:

> These people in the Trekkers group all seem to have come to a kind of peace within themselves. They have gone through bad times, they have gone through good times and they have found the good space. That is what I, you know, get into the most. The acceptance I think is one of the biggest things. You don't have the feeling that anyone is looking down their nose at you. It (divorce)is not very important really.
>
> If it makes you happy then it is important to them. But otherwise, to use that information to talk about you -- they don't need that.

Summary

Friendship is individually defined and constructed; its meaning is grounded in the context of the life course. The Trekkers are a middle-class group of elderly women, active in a wide variety of activities. While most recalled friendships made in stressful times as the most significant and enduring, their activities provided dense networks of current friendships. For some women, re-establishing sibling bonds with sisters also served to broaden their friendship networks.

Understanding friendship also means understanding that life experiences for elderly women, as for anyone else, are uniquely different. Friendship, particularly as a form of

social support, has different characteristics for women with different lifestyles. The widowed women in this study found understanding and support, for the most part, with their peers, women who "spoke the same language" and intimately understood the impact and implications of profound loss. The married women, meanwhile, structured their social lives and friendships mainly around their husbands. Social interactions were undertaken as couples with other couples. Never-married women displayed confidence and independence. Their friendships were mainly with other never-marrieds who shared the same interests. They also had deep, meaningful relationships with, and responsibilities to, other people, contrary to the assertion that never-marrieds are social isolates. The two divorced Trekkers found a safe haven for non judgmental friendships within the organization.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This research study was an attempt to understand the meaning and relevance of friendship in the lives of a group of elderly women engaged in an outdoor recreation organization. A qualitative rather than quantitative approach was used to reflect the intimate experiences and perspectives of the respondents themselves. This chapter addresses issues which both characterized and held implications for this research project. (These issues can be generalized to the larger population, as well as age, experience, and gender.) Conclusions and directions for further research are also suggested.

Size and The Issue of Generalization

The size of the population -- twenty-five active members of whom twelve were interviewed -- is a relatively small sample. Application of the findings to the larger population of elderly women might, therefore, be seen as a limiting factor.

It is important to emphasize that the intent was not to provide a basis for broad generalization. Rather, it was to explore the meaning of friendship within a particular population specifically, the Trekkers, a group of middle-class women engaged in an outdoor recreation

organization. In discussing the representativeness of her research sample (which was small and randomly selected), Jerrome (1981:180) states:

> I take the view that it is sometimes the uniqueness of an event or relationship which gives its analytical significance: social situations do not have to be typical to be illuminating.

The behavior of the Trekkers address theoretical arguments which explain the social process of aging. These arguments concern disengagement, socialization, and activity. Yin (1984:39) suggests that a common complaint about case studies is the difficulty of generalizing from one case to another. Analysts, he states, fall into the trap of trying to find a representative case or set of cases. However, no set of cases, no matter how large, is likely to address the issue. He explains:

> An analyst should try to generalize findings to "theory," analogous to the way a scientist generalizes from experimental results to theory. (Note that the scientist does not try to select representative experiments.)

In conclusion, the case study provided me with a forum for entering the world of a particular group of elderly women. By being part of this world, as a friendly acquaintance as well as a researcher, I believe it was possible to learn much more than by using a quantitative methods. Writing of her own research on friendship and aging, Jerrome

(1981:181) states:

> A cultural identity shared with informants makes it possible for the research worker to assume the role of insider with it's concomitant insights, sensitiveness, privileges of membership and natural biases. But it is combined with the more usual role of the trained anthropologist -- an outsider, committed to a position of objectivity.

Internal validation of the study came from the participants themselves. This was achieved in the course of conversations and interviews. Tacit knowledge is also an integral, and valid component of participant observation. Despite the size of the group, it is a form of knowledge that is valid in and of itself. For example, a sigh, an embrace, laughter at a shared joke, or tears shed remembering the death of a friend are all forms of tacit knowledge.

Age, Experience and Gender

The issue of age, my own as well as the ages of the informants, is worth discussion in this type of research. Burgess (1984:89) argues that the issue of age is "rarely, if ever, taken into account," yet age influences the researcher's role, field relations, and the research process. Although age was never a barrier (I was always made to feel welcome, and invited to participate in all the activities) a generation gap of roughly twenty - five years certainly produced limitations which, in turn, probably

influenced the findings. For example, because I was younger and therefore perceived to be more physically active (compared to several of the more experienced skiers, this was not always the case) I was often encouraged to walk or ski at the head of the line or to join with the faster group. Occasionally, comments seemed like thinly veiled apologies for oldness: "You must find us so slow" and "Out with the old people again?" consistently reinforced the age difference.

From the outset, I was the student, a role I was identified with for the duration of the project. The women frequently asked how things were progressing. "Are you still at it? When can we read it," they would ask. At times, when I was not introduced, new members or those that I had not met on previous trips seemed quizzical at my presence. Comments were sometimes phrased to elicit an explanation: "You look too young to be a senior...." My role as a student was further solidified by my own ethical concerns: the women were entitled to understand the purpose of the research. Most importantly, since they were the expert representatives of their own sub-culture, it was necessary to seek their clarification regarding my observations.

Experience also has an impact on research findings. Burgess (1984) cites Dawe (1973), who argues that sociologists are participants in their own analyses. "Statements of

subjective meaning will incorporate elements of the sociologist's experience as well as the experience of those who are studied" (pg. 89). At times, I found it difficult to comprehend the reality of aging and the end of roles: mother, life partner, worker, and friend. My involvement with the Trekkers coincided with a number of significant personal changes which were, for me new beginnings. My own life course changes, when juxtaposed with the experiences and concerns of the Trekkers seemed polarized. The fact that it was impossible "to do" being an old person, therefore, underscored the importance of the interviews in which the respondents clarified meaning.

While there were differences in our ages and aspects of our life experience, there were overriding similarities as a result of our common gender. As a mother, I was able to cross a common threshold and talk about the joys and tribulations of raising children and running a household. As a woman, I knew exactly what the women meant when they talked about the fear of walking alone along hiking trails and using underground parking lots. In many respects we shared a language intimately understood as women. Perhaps the highlight of these common bonds was the result of a discussion I had with a divorced woman in her seventies. She told me about her life in an unsatisfactory marriage and how she came to the decision to branch out on her own. We talked for two hours about the implications of this decision in

terms of her personal development and happiness. While there were decades between us, I never noticed them and left much the wiser.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this research project are addressed with regard to the following four questions raised in chapter one.

What Is The Meaning Of Friendship For Members of the Trekkers?

Conversations with the Trekkers revealed that each person had her own intimate definition of friendship, uniquely tailored to and woven into the circumstantial fabric of her life. This observation, while seemingly obvious, supports the argument (Matthews, 1986) that understanding friendship requires more than cross sectional, quantitative analysis of cohorts. The interviews showed that friendship is, in fact, a dynamic process throughout the life course. The Trekkers also supported Matthews's argument that there is a qualitative difference between more recent friends and earlier friendships. In support of Elder and Clipp (1988) and their study of friendships made between World War Two veterans, the Trekkers revealed that friendships made during stressful times were often recalled as the most enduring. Even though contact was minimal, these friends were remembered as best friends. Also, involvement with the Trekkers was motivated by a need for

enjoyable activity and companionship, rather than a search for friends with whom to share confidences (although a few of the women had indeed developed deep, lasting friendships with fellow Trekkers).

Do Social Networks Dissolve With Pervasive Role Changes, Or Are There New Friends for Different Purposes (To Meet New Needs?)

While old friendships were held with special regard, particularly as they provided continuity in the women's lives, current friendships were also significant. Typical of other middle-class women (Jerrome, unpublished paper), the Trekkers kept busy daily routines; some agendas seemed in fact, to be exhausting. A wide variety of recreation activities supported Adams's (1986) theory that for some women, aging is characterized by dense networks of social interactions and the opportunity for new experiences. Social networks had not dissolved with aging rather; they diversified and sometimes expanded. Indeed, aging for these women was not marked by rolelessness, but rather the pursuit of a range of community activities and new friendships. Women at one time occupied with the demands of family life, or active in the work force, found the need for more activity as their lives and roles changed. An expanding network of friends sometimes included renewed relationships with siblings, sisters in particular. In support of Gold's (1987) research, feelings of increasing closeness developed

with passing years. Sisters were seen as confidants and sources of social support, particularly in widowhood. A broad range of social commitments from professional clubs and environmental advocacy organizations, to church choirs and book clubs, involved the women in the community at large. It also helped in the adjustment to changed roles and new identities, particularly in the case of widowed respondents. The role of friendship and social support was evident in the informal activities of the Trekkers. Greeting each other and trading news at the parking lot, chatting on the treks, sing songs, meal times, sharing sleeping quarters, slide shows of past trips, and banquets, the newsletters and even the trekking apparel were all expressions of solidarity.

Friendships were in fact, part of a broad educative process, which met both new expressive and practical needs. Caravalgalia (1984:158) cites Bandura's (1977) argument that learning is based on modeling, vicarious learning (seeing others perform threatening activities without adverse consequences), and verbal persuasion. This was evident with the Trekkers. Some women, particularly the more active, served as role models by coaxing and teaching the less experience. The women encouraged each other on the ski trails. Some had never been on skis before joining the group, or had never hiked in dense bush. In conversations, they shared information and gave advice on an eclectic array

of topics, including courses and activities for seniors, gardening, travel, cooking, and flower and wildlife identification. Some women said that their confidence had increased as a result of this companionship and support. These observations support the argument that aging women look to each other for indirect aid in the form of support and self validation (Jerrome, 1981) and that socialization teaches individuals how to perform new roles and adjust to changing ones (Ward, 1985).

What Factors Drew These Women Together To Participate In An Outdoor Recreation Activity?

Enjoyment of similar recreation interests in the company of other women were the primary factors which drew the women together. While all of the women indicated emotionally positive relationships and frequent contact with family members, particularly children, recreation and leisure pursuits were undertaken almost exclusively with peers.

All were interested in atypical outdoor activity and maintaining physical health. Keeping in shape was unanimously associated with preserving independence in old age; a concern deeply shared by all the women. As well, maintaining optimum health was seen to be synonymous with independence -- and freedom -- from the dreaded possibility of incarceration in a nursing home. The argument that good

health has the most significant impact on the ability of elderly women to participate in social life and maintain friendships (Connidis, 1986; Liang et al., 1980) was substantiated by the Trekkers: the majority of members unable to participate suffered from failing health. Although they were no longer active, the annual banquets and newsletters provided arm's length contact with the rest of the membership.

While a few felt an obligation to show group support by attending outings as frequently as possible, the majority found flexibility and informality attractive drawing factors. Since their lives were structured around numerous community activities and travel, as well as occasional bouts of ill health and hospitalization, the non-compulsory nature of the organization complemented their life styles. It could be said that the lack of obligation was a negative factor affecting friendship bonds. For example, if the women felt no commitment to attend the outings, what could be said of their commitment to the other members? It was however, the non-obligatory nature of the group which facilitated lasting friendships. In fact, the majority of women had been meeting for more than six years; several maintained their friendships outside of trekking. The lack of external obligation gave the women freedom of choice to attend or not to attend as they wished. Lack of advertising and active solicitation (there was no follow-up of first time members

to determine their reactions and encourage attendance) resulted in a natural selection process. Members were under no pressure to continue; they returned year after year because they enjoyed the activities and the companionship of the other women. In addition, they had the freedom to determine the degree of privacy and involvement that they wished. Some complained that within other seniors' activity groups they felt pressure to divulge information about themselves. The Trekkers, however, made no such demands; one could offer as much personal information as one wanted.

This process of self selection resulted in a group of middle-class women with similar experiences and values. They spoke the same language: "I lost my husband two years ago, and I'm lonely" explained a 76 year old first time member. "It takes quite a while to get used to it; actually, I don't think you ever do," empathized another. Shortly after these two women met, they walked along a river valley trail talking about teaching in a small town, knitting patterns, and whether or not the merits of practicing safe sex should be included in the high school curriculum (they arrived at no conclusion, but rather agreed that education had certainly taken some new twists since their retirement). The Trekkers expressed similar sentiments on most issues; their conversational patterns were similar as well as their personal and historical experiences. These findings lend support to the argument that the more similar people are,

the more likely they will meet and become friends (Verugge, 1977; Cameron and Cramer, 1974; Hess, 1972). "Similarity in age, like similarity in gender, marital status, and social class, is a status attribute that promotes friendship formation (Matthews, 19879:48).

Differences in Friendship Patterns Between Widowed, Married, Divorced, and Never-Married Women

Friendships were marked by global similarities and were the result of common interests, experiences, and backgrounds. Interviews revealed that there were also similarities and differences between various lifestyles within the organization itself.

Widowed Trekkers who agreed to be interviewed said friendships with other widowed women were more common and frequently more closely held than friendships with married women. While the widows were not without married friends, their supportive social networks were predominantly with widowed women like themselves. These women were intimately familiar with the numbing loneliness and grief that accompanies the loss of a life-long mate. The circumstances of their lives also brought about similar changes in daily routines. Someone else's needs no longer had to be met, so the daily rhythm of life changed. Evenings spent together as couples (most often at home) became long stretches of time to block in, most often in the company of other women also without spouses. In some cases, the primary contact with

others had been through their husbands. Involvement with the Trekkers helped to pass long quiet nights, particularly on the overnight treks and regular weekly evenings out. It was good, on occasion, to sleep under one roof with others and then to prepare and eat breakfast together.

It was interesting to note that widowed women mutually accepted that widowhood meant exclusion from activities with married friends. Of course, this was not always the case. Interviews revealed that the women were indeed included in social activities with married couples. But some widows agreed that sympathy and a sense of obligation might be motivating factors for their inclusion. They seemed to accept that a change in status brought about by widowhood sometimes paralleled withdrawal from friendships with married women. This exclusion and withdrawal was discussed in a matter-of-fact way, without bitterness or anger. This observation supports Blau's findings (1961) that widows are often socially isolated until their married friends become widows as well. Together with the trauma associated with the loss of a spouse, there is also the additional loss of friendship groups.

Observations of married couples in this study support the argument that marriage is the "paramount example of an intimate dyadic relationship in adult life" (Connidis, 1986:76). Accordingly, married Trekkers related overall happiness and satisfaction with their lives. While they all

enjoyed close friendships with other women, these friendships played a secondary role to their relationships with spouses. During the interviews, they usually spoke in terms of "we". Most often, they walked side by side and always ate together on the treks. Married women unanimously stated that they were enjoying retirement years with their spouses. Economic security, launching of children, and good health permitted extensive travelling and active participation in numerous recreational activities. As well, they frequently socialized with their children and friends. In all respects, their lives appeared to revolve around each other. This is not to say, however, that married women had minimal interaction with non-married participants. Rather, it was commonly accepted that their place was with their husbands.

The majority of never-married women appeared to have a strong instrumental interest in belonging to the group. While the opportunity to socialize and develop friendships with other women was seen as an attractive feature, exploring and understanding the surrounding flora and fauna were emphasized. While independence and locus of control were not attributes exclusive to the never-marrieds, they were most typically observed within this group. In addition, the never-marrieds did not mention loneliness as a factor in their lives, as did the widowed women. In support of Jerrome's (1981) findings, they had become used to single

status, or had built a pattern of friendships to accommodate the changes in their lives. Retirement was not a negative role loss. Instead, never-married, single Trekkers saw it as the opportunity to develop new friendships, pursue new activities and keep on with the established ones, particularly hiking and skiing.

It is difficult to draw conclusions concerning friendship patterns of the divorced women in this study. Both women interviewed indicated that a broad base of friendships were important in their lives, and that long term friends had provided invaluable support during the difficult times of their initial separation and divorce. Perhaps the most significant finding was the agreement that the Trekkers organization provided a safe haven from prying questions and judgmental comments which they were subjected to in other seniors' clubs and organizations.

In summary, friendship patterns within the Trekkers were developed within a forum of shared recreational interests and facilitated through social status similarity and common life course experiences. While outdoor activity was the primary motivating factor for the group's existence, the social component meant the development of friendships between women of different life styles over the course of several years and in varying degrees of intensity. For some women, these friendships were supportive: positive role models assisted in the adjustment to old age and confirmed a

sense of self worth and self confidence. Since they participated in a wide variety of activities and enjoyed dense networks of friendships, the suggestion that friendships dwindle with old age is called into question.

Implications For Further Research

In terms of research related to recreation planning for the elderly, the Trekkers demonstrate that adventure and excitement are not exclusive to the young. Indeed, the adage that one is "never to old to learn" was repeatedly confirmed by the Trekkers, many of whom had never been on skis before their seventieth birthdays. Therefore, research might further address the significance and availability of atypical recreation activities that extend beyond day time hours. The importance of overnight treks to the well-being of elderly women, particularly those who live alone, might also provide new directions for recreation planning and facilitate further understanding of their psycho-social needs.

Since positive role models had a significant impact in the recreation activities of the Trekkers, research might be given to the importance of age in recreation leadership for the elderly. As well, the importance of the expressive component -- women's friendships -- in recreation groups for elderly women has important sociological implications for an aging population. This study dealt with middle-class, fairly fit women who were living in relative comfort and able to

take advantage of a wide variety of resources and activities. Questions are raised concerning the situation of a great many elderly women living marginally in poverty and isolation.

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